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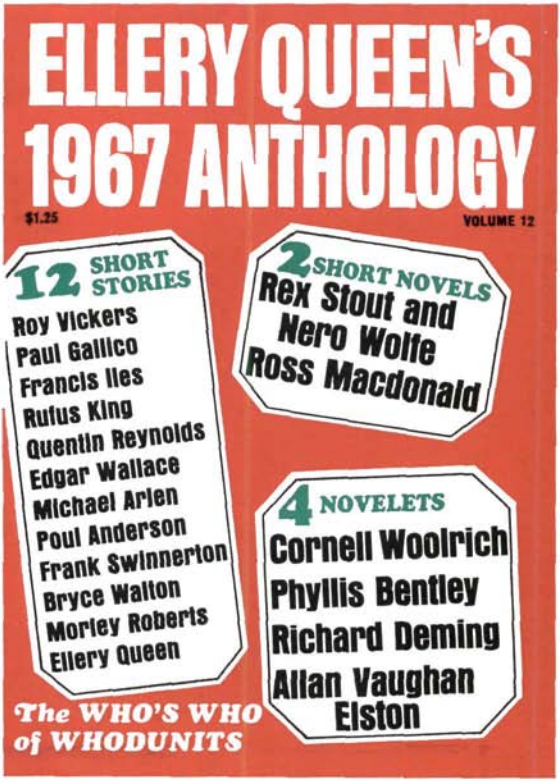

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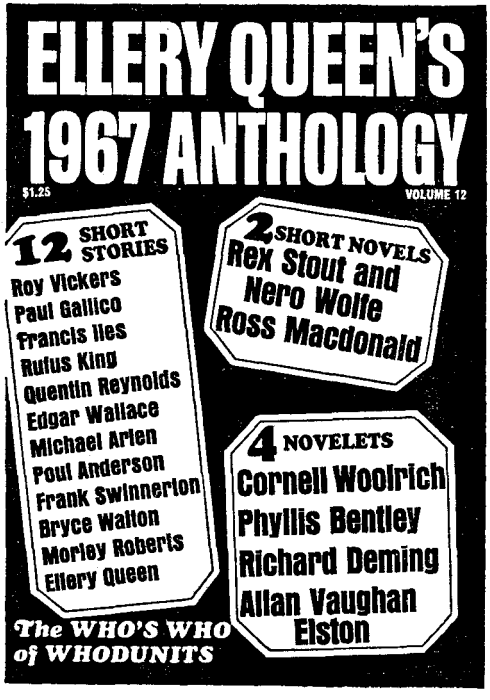

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the first *NEW* Mom story by
JAMES YAFFE
in more than 10 years!

It doesn't seem possible—but the last Mom story, "Mom Makes a Wish," was published in our June 1955 issue—more than a decade ago! So, welcome back, Mom, welcome home—to EQMM, the only magazine in which your wonderful Friday-night adventures-in-deduction have appeared. It is a time for celebrating—gefülte fish, noodle soup, roast chicken, and maybe a little Manischewitz . . .

You know, it has taken us ten years to realize something. Suddenly it occurs to us that Mom is, in essence, an "armchair detective." Surely it is true that she never leaves her Bronx apartment to visit and examine the scene of the crime or to question any of the suspects. Of course she doesn't actually sit in an armchair while solving cases from the facts related by her son the detective. Usually she's sitting at the dining-room table and urging her son Davie and his wife Shirley to eat (though Mom's cooking obviously needs very little urging); but if you wish, you can visualize Mom sitting in the living room—perhaps in an old-fashioned chair that has been in the family for generations. So meet the one and only Mom—the one and only Morris-chair detective—in one of her most fascinating delvings into the secret recesses of the human heart . . . a story about music lovers and a murder that happened at—of all places—the Metropolitan Opera House . . . Enjoy yourself! Ess gesundte heit!

GOOD NEWS DEPT.: *James Yaffe has promised to write more Mom stories, and we intend to make sure that Mr. Yaffe keeps his promise!*

MOM SINGS AN ARIA

by JAMES YAFFE

IT WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST disappointments of my mother's life that I never turned out to be a musical genius. For a couple of years, when I was a kid, Mom made me take violin lessons. At the end

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of the first year I played a piece called *Rustling Leaves*. At the end of the second year I was still playing *Rustling Leaves*. Poor Mom had to admit I wasn't another Jascha Heifetz, and that was the end of my musical career.

Mom has always been crazy about music herself. She did a little singing when she was a girl, and might have done something with her voice —instead she got married, moved up to the Bronx, and devoted herself to raising a future Lieutenant in the New York City Homicide Squad. But she still listens regularly to the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera, and she can still hum along with all the familiar arias. That was why—when my wife Shirley and I went up to the Bronx the other night for our regular Friday dinner—I knew Mom would be interested in my latest case.

"You're a music lover, Mom," I said. "Maybe you can understand how a man could love music so much that he'd commit murder for it."

"This is hard to understand?" Mom said, looking up from her roast chicken. "Why else did I stop your violin lessons? Once, while you were playing one of your pieces, I happened to take a look at your teacher, Mrs. Steinberg—and on her face was murder, if I ever saw it!"

"You don't mean that literally, do you, Mother?" Shirley said. "A woman wouldn't *really* feel like murdering a little boy because he played the violin badly."

"People can have plenty feelings that were never in your Psychology books at college," Mom said. "Believe me, in my own family—my Aunt Goldie who thought the pigeon outside her window was actually her late husband Jake—"

Mom went into detail, and her story was fascinating. Then she passed the chicken a second time, and I was able to get back to my murder.

"Have you ever seen the standing-room line at the Metropolitan Opera House?" I said. "Half an hour before every performance the box office sells standing-room tickets at two-fifty each, on a first-come first-served basis. The opera lovers start lining up outside the house hours ahead of time. They stand on their feet for three hours *before* the opera just so they can stand on their feet for three hours *during* the opera! Talk about crazy human motives!"

"People with no ears in their heads," Mom said, "shouldn't be so quick to call other people crazy." And she gave me one of those glares which has been making me feel like a naughty little five-year-old ever since I *was* a naughty little five-year-old.

I turned my eyes away and pushed on. "Well, there are certain people who show up on the opera standing-room line night after night, for

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practically every performance throughout the season. These 'regulars' are almost always at the head of the line—they come earlier than anyone else, wait longer, and take the best center places once they get inside the house. And since most of them have been doing this for years, they know each other by name, and they pass the time gossiping about the opera singers and discussing the performances. You could almost say they've got an exclusive little social club all their own—only their meeting place isn't a clubhouse, it's the sidewalk in front of the Met. Anyway, you couldn't imagine a more harmless collection of old fogeys—the last group on earth where you'd expect to find a murderer!"

"Even an opera lover has to have a private life," Mom said. "He enjoys himself with the beautiful music—but he's still got business troubles or love troubles or family troubles waiting for him at home."

"That's just it, Mom. If one of these standing-room regulars had gone home and killed his wife or his mother-in-law or his business partner, this would just be a routine case. But what happened was, he killed one of the other people in the standing-room line."

Mom was looking at me with her eyes narrowed—a sure sign that I had her interested. "The two oldest regulars in the standing-room line," I said, "the charter members of the club, are Sam Cohen and Giuseppe D'Angelo. Cohen used to be a pharmacist, with his own drug store on West Eighty-third Street. He retired fifteen years ago, after his wife died, and turned the management of the store over to his nephew, though he went on living in the apartment above it. As soon as he retired, he started going to the opera almost every night of the season.

"D'Angelo was in the exterminating business out in Queens—insects, rodents, and so on—but *he* retired fifteen years ago too. His wife is alive, but she doesn't care for music, so he's been in the habit of going to the opera by himself—almost every night of the season, just like Cohen.

"The two old men met on the standing-room line fifteen years ago, and have seen each other three or four nights a week ever since—but only at the opera, never anywhere else. As far as we know, they've never met for a drink or a lunch, they've never been to each other's homes, and they've never seen each other at all in the summer, when the opera is closed.

"Opera is the biggest thing in both their lives. Cohen's mother was a vocal coach back in Germany, and he cut his teeth on operatic arias—D'Angelo was born and brought up in the city of Parma, which they tell me is the most operatic city in Italy—"

"I've read about Parma," Mom said. "If a tenor hits a bad note

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there, they run him out of town."

"How horrible!" Shirley said. "It's positively uncivilized!"

Mom shrugged. "A little less civilization here in New York, and maybe we wouldn't hear so many bad notes."

I could see the cloud of indignation forming on Shirley's face—she never *has* caught on to Mom's peculiar sense of humor. I hurried on, "Well, the two old men both loved opera, but their opinions about it have always been diametrically opposed. So for fifteen years they've been carrying on a running argument. If Cohen likes a certain soprano, D'Angelo can't stand her. If D'Angelo mentions having heard Caruso sing *Aida* in 1920, Cohen says that Caruso never sang *Aida* till 1923.

"And the old men haven't conducted these arguments in nice soft gentlemenly voices either. They yell at each other, wave their arms, call each other all sorts of names. 'Liar' and 'moron' are about the tamest I can think of. In spite of their bitterness, of course, these fights have never lasted long—before the night is over, or at least by the time of the next performance, the old men always make it up between them—"

"Until now?" Mom said.

"I'll get to that in a minute, Mom. Just a little more background first. According to the other regulars on the standing-room line, the fights between Cohen and D'Angelo have become even more bitter than usual in recent years. They've been aggravated by a controversy which has been raging among opera lovers all over the world. Who's the greatest soprano alive today—Maria Callas or Renata Tebaldi?"

Mom dropped her fork and clasped her hands to her chest, and on her face came that ecstatic, almost girlish look which she reserves exclusively for musical matters. "Callas! Tebaldi! Voices like angels, both of them! That Callas—such fire, such passion! That Tebaldi—such beauty, such sadness! To choose which one is the greatest—it's as foolish as trying to choose between noodle soup and borscht!"

"Cohen and D'Angelo made their choices, though," I said. "D'Angelo announced one day that Tebaldi was glorious and Callas had a voice like a rooster—so right away Cohen told him that Callas was divine and Tebaldi sang like a cracked phonograph record. And the argument has been getting more and more furious through the years.

"A week ago a climax was reached. Callas was singing *Traviata*, and the standing-room line started to form even earlier than usual. Cohen and D'Angelo, of course, were right there among the first. Cohen had a bad cold—he was sneezing all the time he stood in line—but he said he wouldn't miss Callas' *Traviata* if he was down with double pneumonia. And D'Angelo said that personally he could live happily for

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the rest of his life without hearing Callas butcher *Traviata*—he was here tonight, he said, only because of the tenor, Richard Tucker."

"That Richard Tucker!" Mom gave her biggest, most motherly smile. "Such a wonderful boy—just as much at home in the *schul* as he is in the opera. What a proud mother he must have!" And Mom gave me a look which made it clear that she still hadn't quite forgiven me for *Rustling Leaves.*

"With such a long wait on the standing-room line," I said, "Cohen and D'Angelo had time to whip up a first-class battle. According to Frau Hochschwender—she's a German lady who used to be a concert pianist and now gives piano lessons, and she's also one of the standing-room regulars—Cohen and D'Angelo had never insulted each other so violently in all the years she'd known them. If the box office had opened an hour later, she says they would have come to blows.

"As it turned out, the performance itself didn't even put an end to their fight. Ordinarily, once the opera began, both men became too wrapped up in the music to remember they were mad at each other—but this time, when the first act ended, Cohen grabbed D'Angelo by the arm and accused him of deliberately groaning after Callas' big aria. 'You did it to ruin the evening for me!' Cohen said. He wouldn't pay attention to D'Angelo's denials. 'I'll get even with you,' he said. 'Wait till the next time Tebaldi is singing!' "

"And the next time Tebaldi was singing," Mom said, "was the night of the murder?"

"Exactly. Three nights ago Tebaldi sang *Tosca*—"

"*Tosca*!" Mom's face lighted up. "Such a beautiful opera! Such a sad story! She's in love with this handsome young artist, and this villain makes advances and tries to force her to give in to him, so she stabs him with a knife. Come to think of it, the villain in that opera is a police officer."

I looked hard, but I couldn't see any trace of sarcasm on Mom's face.

"Those opera plots are really ridiculous, aren't they?" Shirley said. "So exaggerated and unrealistic."

"Unrealistic!" Mom turned to her sharply. "You should know some of the things that go on—right here in this building. Didn't Polichek the janitor have his eye on his wife's baby sitter?"

Another fascinating story came out of Mom, and then I went on. "Anyway, for the whole week-end before *Tosca*, D'Angelo worried that Cohen would do something to spoil the performance for him. He worried so much that the night before, he called Cohen up and pleaded with him not to make trouble."

"And Cohen answered?"

"His nephew was in the room

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with him when the call came. He was going over some account books and didn't really pay attention to what his uncle was saying—but at one point he heard Cohen raise his voice angrily and shout out, 'You can't talk me out of it! When Tebaldi hits her high C in the big aria, I'm going to start booing!' "

Mom shook her head. "Terrible—a terrible threat for a civilized man to make! So does D'Angelo admit that Cohen made it?"

"Well, yes and no. In the early part of the phone conversation, D'Angelo says he and Cohen were yelling at each other so angrily that neither of them listened to what the other one was saying. But later on in the conversation—or so D'Angelo claims—Cohen calmed down and promised to let Tebaldi sing her aria in peace."

"Cohen's nephew says he didn't?"

"Not exactly. He left the room while Cohen was still on the phone—he had to check some receipts in the cash register—so he never heard the end of the conversation. For all he knows Cohen *might* have calmed down and made that promise."

"And what about D'Angelo's end of the phone conversation? Was anybody in the room with *him?*"

"His wife was. And she swears that he *did* get such a promise out of Cohen. But of course she's his wife, so she's anxious to protect him. And besides she's very deaf, and she won't wear a hearing aid—she's kind of a vain old lady. So what it boils down to, we've got nobody's word except D'Angelo's that Cohen didn't intend to carry out his threat."

"Which brings us," Mom said, "to the night Tebaldi sang *Tosca?*"

"Cohen and D'Angelo both showed up early on the standing-room line that night. Frau Hochschwender says they greeted each other politely, but all the time they were waiting they hardly exchanged a word. No arguments, no differences of opinion—nothing. And her testimony is confirmed by another one of the regulars who was there—Miss Phoebe Van Voorhees. She's an old lady in her seventies, always dresses in black.

"Miss Van Voorhees came from a wealthy New York family, and when she was a young woman she used to have a regular box at the opera—but the money ran out ten or twelve years ago, and now she lives alone in a cheap hotel in the East Twenties, and she waits on the standing-room line two nights a week. She's so frail-looking you wouldn't think she could stay on her feet for five minutes, much less five hours—but she loves opera, so she does it."

"For love," Mom said, "people can perform miracles."

"Well, Miss Van Voorhees and Frau Hochschwender both say that Cohen and D'Angelo were unusually restrained with each other. Which seems to prove that they were still mad at each other and

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hadn't made up the quarrel over the phone, as D'Angelo claims—"

"Or maybe it proves the opposite," Mom said. "They *did* make up the quarrel, and they were so scared of starting another quarrel that they shut up and wouldn't express any opinions."

"Whatever it proves, Mom, here's what happened. On cold nights it's the custom among the standing-room regulars for one of them to go to the cafeteria a block away and get hot coffee for the others—meanwhile they hold his place in the line. The night of Tebaldi's *Tosca* was very cold, and it was D'Angelo's turn to bring the coffee.

"He went for it about forty-five minutes before the box office opened, and got back with it in fifteen or twenty minutes. He was carrying four cardboard containers. Three of them contained coffee with cream and sugar—for Frau Hochschwender, Miss Van Voorhees, and D'Angelo himself. In the fourth container was black coffee without sugar—the way Cohen always took it.

"Well, they all gulped down their coffee, shielding it from the wind with their bodies—and about half an hour later the doors opened. They bought their tickets, went into the opera house, and stood together in their usual place in the back, at the center.

"At eight sharp the opera began. Tebaldi was in great voice, and the audience was enthusiastic. At the end of the first act all of the standing-room regulars praised her—except Cohen. He just grunted and said nothing. Frau Hochschwender and Miss Van Voorhees both say that he looked pale and a little ill.

" 'Wait till she sings her big aria in the second act,' D'Angelo said. 'I hope she sings it good,' Cohen said—and Frau Hochschwender says there was a definite threat in his voice. But Miss Van Voorhees says she didn't notice anything significant in his voice—to her it just sounded like an offhand remark. Then the second act began, and it was almost time for Tebaldi's big aria—"

"Such a beautiful aria!" Mom said. "*Vissy darty*. It's Italian. She's telling that police officer villain that all her life she's cared only for love and for art, and she never wanted to hurt a soul. She tells him this, and a little later she stabs him." And in a low voice, a little quavery but really kind of pretty, Mom began to half sing and half hum—"*Vissy darty, vissy damory*—" Then she broke off, and did something I had seldom seen her do. She blushed.

There was a moment of silence, while Shirley and I carefully refrained from looking at each other. Then I said, "So a few minutes before Tebaldi's big aria, Cohen suddenly gave a groan, then he grabbed hold of Frau Hochschwender's arm and said, 'I'm sick—' And then he started making strangling noises, and dropped like a lead weight to the floor.

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"Somebody went for a doctor, and D'Angelo got down on his knees by Cohen and said, 'Cohen, Cohen, what's the matter?' And Cohen, with his eyes straight on D'Angelo's face, said, 'You no-good! You deserve to die for what you did!' Those were his exact words, Mom—half a dozen people heard them.

"Then a doctor came, with a couple of ushers, and they took Cohen out to the lobby—and D'Angelo, Frau Hochschwender, and Miss Van Voorhees followed. A little later an ambulance came, but Cohen was dead before he got to the hospital.

"At first the doctors thought it was a heart attack, but they did a routine autopsy—and found enough poison in his stomach to kill a man half his age and twice his strength. The dose he swallowed must've taken two to three hours to produce a reaction—which means he swallowed it while he was on the standing-room line. Well, nobody saw him swallow *anything* on the standing-room line except that container of hot black coffee."

"And when the doctors looked at the contents of his stomach?"

"They found the traces of his lunch, which *couldn't* have contained the poison or he would've died long before he got to the opera house—and they found that coffee—and that was all they found. So the coffee had to be what killed him."

"And since that old man D'Angelo was the one who gave him the coffee, you naturally think he's the murderer."

"What else can we think, Mom? For five minutes or so—from the time he picked up the coffee at the cafeteria to the time he gave it to Cohen at the opera house—D'Angelo was alone with it. Nobody was watching him—he could easily have slipped something into it. And nobody *else* had such an opportunity. Cohen took the coffee from D'Angelo, turned away to shield the container from the cold wind, and drank it all down then and there. Only D'Angelo *could* have put the poison into it."

"What about the man at the cafeteria who made the coffee?"

"That doesn't make sense, Mom. The man at the cafeteria would have no way of knowing who the coffee was meant for. He'd have to be a complete psycho who didn't care *who* he poisoned. Just the same, though, we checked him out. He poured the coffee into the container directly from a big urn—twenty other people had been drinking coffee from that same urn. Then in front of a dozen witnesses he handed the container to D'Angelo without putting a thing in it—not even sugar, because Cohen never took his coffee with sugar. So we're right back to D'Angelo—he *has* to be the murderer."

"And where did he get it, this deadly poison? Correct me if I'm wrong, but such an item isn't some-

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thing you can pick up at your local supermarket."

"Sure, it's against the law to sell poison to the general public. But you'd be surprised how easy it is to get hold of the stuff anyway. The kind that killed Cohen is a common commercial compound—it's used to mix paints, for metallurgy, in certain medicines, in insecticides. Ordinary little pellets of rat poison are made of it sometimes, and you can buy them at your local hardware store—a couple of dozen kids swallow them by accident in this city every year. And don't forget, D'Angelo used to be in the exterminating business—he knows all the sources, it would be easier for him to get his hands on poison than for most other people."

"So you've arrested him for the murder?" Mom said.

I gave a sigh. "No, we haven't."

"How come? What's holding you up?"

"It's the motive, Mom. D'Angelo and Cohen had absolutely no connection with each other outside of the standing-room line. Cohen didn't leave D'Angelo any money, he wasn't having an affair with D'Angelo's wife, he didn't know a deep dark secret out of D'Angelo's past. There's only one reason why D'Angelo could have killed him—to stop him from booing at the end of Renata Tebaldi's big aria. That's why he committed the murder. I'm morally certain of it, and so is everyone else in the Department. And so is the D.A.'s office—but they won't let us make the arrest."

"And why not?"

"Because nobody believes for one moment that we can get a jury to believe such a motive. Juries are made up of ordinary everyday people. They don't go to the opera. They think it's all a lot of nonsense—fat women screaming at fat men, in a foreign language. I can sympathize with them—I think so myself. Can you imagine the D.A. standing up in front of a jury and saying, 'The defendant was so crazy about an opera singer's voice that he killed a man for disagreeing with him!' The jury would laugh in the D.A.'s face."

I sighed harder than before. "We've got an airtight case. The perfect opportunity. No other possible suspects. The dying man's accusation—'You no-good! You deserve to die for what you did!' But we don't dare bring the killer to trial."

Mom didn't say anything for a few seconds. Her eyes were almost shut, the corners of her mouth were turned down. I know this expression well—her "thinking" expression. Something always comes out of it.

Finally she looked up and gave a nod. "Thank God for juries!"

"What do you mean, Mom?"

"I mean, if it wasn't for ordinary everyday people with common sense, God knows *who* you experts would be sending to jail!"

"Mom, are you saying that D'Angelo *didn't*—"

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"I'm saying nothing. Not yet. First I'm asking. Four questions."

No doubt about it, whenever Mom starts asking her questions, that means she's on the scent, she's getting ready to hand me a solution to another one of my cases.

My feelings, as always, were mixed. On the one hand, nobody admires Mom more than I do—her deep knowledge of human nature acquired among her friends and neighbors in the Bronx; her uncanny sharpness in applying that knowledge to the crimes I tell her about from time to time.

On the other hand—well, how ecstatic is a man supposed to get at the idea that his mother can do his own job better than *he* can? That's why I've never been able to talk about Mom's talent to anybody else in the Department—except, of course, to Inspector Milner, my immediate superior, and only because he's a widower, and Shirley and I are trying to get something going between Mom and him.

So I guess my voice wasn't as enthusiastic as it should have been, when I said to Mom, "Okay, what are your four questions?"

"First I bring in the peach pie," Mom said.

We waited while the dishes were cleared, and new dishes were brought. Then the heavenly aroma of Mom's peach pie filled the room. One taste of it, and my enthusiasm began to revive. "What *are* your questions, Mom?"

She lifted her finger. "Number One: you mentioned that Cohen had a cold a week ago, the night Maria Callas was singing *Traviata*. Did he still have the same cold three nights ago, when Tebaldi was singing *Tosca*?"

By this time I ought to be used to Mom's questions. I ought to take it on faith that they're probably not as irrelevant as they sound. But I still can't quite keep the bewilderment out of my voice.

"As a matter of fact," I said, "Cohen *did* have a cold the night of the murder. Frau Hochschwender and Miss Van Voorhees both mentioned it—he was sneezing while he waited in line, and even a few times during the performance, though he tried hard to control himself."

Mom's face gave no indication whether this was or wasn't what she had wanted to hear. She lifted another finger. "Number Two: after the opera every night, was it the custom for those standing-room regulars to separate right away—or did they maybe stay together for a little while before they finally said good night?"

"They usually went to the cafeteria a block away—the same place where D'Angelo bought the coffee that Cohen drank—and sat at a table for an hour or so and discussed the performance they'd just heard. Over coffee and doughnuts—or Danish pastry."

Mom gave a nod, and lifted an-

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other finger. "Number Three: at the hospital you naturally examined what was in Cohen's pockets? Did you find something like an envelope—a small envelope with absolutely nothing in it?"

This question really made me jump. "We did find an envelope, Mom! Ordinary stationery size—it was unsealed, and there was no address or stamp on it. But how in the world did you—"

Mom's fourth finger was in the air. "Number Four: how many more times this season is Renata Tebaldi supposed to sing *Tosca*?"

"It was Tebaldi's first, last, and only performance of *Tosca* this season," I said. "The posters in front of the opera house said so. But I don't see what that has to do with—"

"You don't see," Mom said. "Naturally. You're like all the younger generation these days. So scientific. Facts you see. D'Angelo was the only one who was ever alone with Cohen's coffee—so D'Angelo must have put the poison in. A fact, so you see it. But what about the *people* already? Who is D'Angelo—who was Cohen—what type human beings? This you wouldn't ask yourself. Probably you wouldn't even understand about my Uncle Julius and the World Series."

"I'm sorry, Mom. I never knew you *had* an Uncle Julius—"

"I don't have him no more. That's the point of the story. All his life he was a fan from the New York Yankees. He rooted for them, he bet money on them, and when they played the World Series he was always there to watch them. Until a couple of years ago when he had his heart attack, and he was in the hospital at World Series time.

"'I'll watch the New York Yankees on television,' he said. 'The excitement is too much for you,' the doctor said, 'it'll kill you.' But Uncle Julius had his way, and he watched the World Series. Every day he watched, and every night the doctor said, 'You'll be dead before morning.' And Uncle Julius said, 'I wouldn't die till I know how the World Series comes out!' So finally the New York Yankees won the World Series—and an hour later Uncle Julius went to sleep and died."

Mom stopped talking, and looked around at Shirley and me. Then she shook her head and said, "You don't follow yet? A man with a love for something that's outside himself, that isn't even his family—with a love for the New York Yankees or for Renata Tebaldi—in such a man this feeling is stronger than his personal worries or his personal ambitions. He wouldn't let anything interrupt his World Series in the middle, not even dying. He wouldn't let anything interrupt his opera in the middle—not even murdering."

I began to see a glimmer of

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Mom's meaning. "You're talking about D'Angelo, Mom?"

"Who else? Renata Tebaldi was singing her one and only *Tosca* for the year, and for D'Angelo, Renata Tebaldi is the greatest singer alive. Never—in a million years, never—would he do anything to spoil this performance for himself, to make him walk out of it before the end. Let's say he *did* want to murder Cohen. The last time in the world he'd pick for this murder would be in the middle of Tebaldi's *Tosca*—her one and only Tosca! Especially since he could wait just as easy till after the opera, when the standing-room regulars would be having cake and coffee at the cafeteria—he could just as easy poison Cohen *then*."

"But Mom, isn't that kind of far-fetched, psychologically? If the average man was worked up enough to commit a murder, he wouldn't care about hearing the end of an opera first!"

"Excuse me, Davie—the average man's psychology we're not talking about. The opera lover's psychology we are talking about. This is why you and the Homicide Squad and the District Attorney couldn't make heads and tails from this case. Because you don't understand from opera lovers. In this world they don't live—they've got a world of their own. Inside their heads things are going on which other people's heads never even dreamed about. To solve this case you have to think like an opera lover."

"To solve this case, Mom, you have to answer the basic question: if D'Angelo didn't poison that coffee, who *could* have?"

"Who says the coffee was poisoned?"

"But I told you about the autopsy. The poison took two to three hours to work, and the contents of Cohen's stomach—"

"The contents of his stomach! You should show a little more interest in the contents of Cohen's pockets!"

"There was nothing unusual in his pockets—"

"Why should a man carry in his pocket an empty unsealed envelope, without any writing on it, without even a stamp on it? Only because it wasn't empty when he put it there. Something was in it—something which he expected to need later on in the evening—something which he finally took out of the envelope—"

"What are you talking about, Mom?"

"I'm talking about Cohen's cold. An ordinary man, he don't think twice about going to the opera with a cold. What's the difference if he sneezes a little? It's only music. But to an opera lover, sneezing during a performance, disturbing people, competing with the singers—this is worse than a major crime. A real opera lover like Cohen, he'd do everything he could to keep his cold under control.

"Which explains what he put in

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that envelope before he left his home to go to the opera house. A pill, what else? One of these new prescription cold pills that dries up your nose and keeps you from sneezing for five-six hours. And why was the envelope empty when you found it in his pocket? Because half an hour before the box office opened, he slipped out his pill and swallowed it down with his hot black coffee."

"Nobody *saw* him taking that pill, Mom."

"Why should anybody see him? Like you explained yourself, to drink his coffee he had to turn his body away and shield the container from the wind."

I was beginning to be shaken, no doubt about it. But Shirley spoke up now, in her sweet voice, the voice she always uses when she thinks she's one up on Mom. "The facts don't seem to bear you out, Mother. All the witnesses say that Mr. Cohen went on sneezing *after* the opera had begun. Well, if he really did take a cold pill, as you believe, why didn't it have any effect on his symptoms?"

A gleam came to Mom's eyes, and I could see she was about to pounce. The fact is that Shirley never learns.

So to spare my wife's feelings I broke in quickly, before Mom could open her mouth. "I'm afraid that confirms Mom's theory, honey. The reason why the cold pill didn't work was that it wasn't a cold pill. It looked like one on the outside maybe, but it actually contained poison."

"I always knew I didn't produce a dope!" Mom said, with a big satisfied smile. "So now the answer is simple, no? If Cohen was carrying around a poison pill in his pocket, where did he get it? Who gave it to him? Why should he think it was a cold pill? Because somebody told him it was. Somebody he thought he could trust—not only personally but professionally. Somebody he went to and said, 'Give me some of that new stuff, that new wonder drug, that'll keep me from sneezing during the opera—' "

"His nephew!" I interrupted. "My God, Mom, I think you're right. Cohen's nephew *is* a pharmacist—he manages the drug store that Cohen owned. He has access to all kinds of poison and he could make up a pill that would look like a real cold pill. And what's more, he's the only relative Cohen has in the world. He inherits Cohen's store and Cohen's savings."

Mom spread her hands. "So there you are. You couldn't ask for a more ordinary, old-fashioned motive for murder. Any jury will be able to understand it. It isn't one bit operatic."

"But Mom, you must've suspected Cohen's nephew from the start. Otherwise you wouldn't have asked your question about the empty envelope."

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"Naturally I suspected him. It was the lie he told."

"What lie?"

"The night before the opera D'Angelo called up Cohen and tried to make up their quarrel. Now according to the nephew, Cohen made a threat to D'Angelo over the phone. 'When Tebaldi hits her high C in the big aria, I'm going to start booing!' A terrible threat—but Cohen never could have made it."

"I don't see why not—"

"Because Cohen was an opera lover, that's why. A high C—this is a tenor's note. It's the top of his range—when he hits one, everybody is thrilled and says how wonderful he is. But for a soprano a high C is nothing special. She can go a lot higher than that. A high E—sometimes even an E sharp—*this* is the big note for a soprano. In the *Vissy darty* from *Tosca*, any soprano who couldn't do better than a high C would be strictly an amateur. People who are ignoramuses about opera—people like Cohen's nephew—they never *heard* of anything except the high C. But an opera lover like Cohen—he positively couldn't make such a mistake. Now excuse me, I'll bring in the coffee."

Mom got to her feet, and then Shirley called out, "Wait a second, Mother. If his nephew committed the murder, why did Cohen accuse D'Angelo of doing it?"

"When did Cohen accuse D'Angelo?"

"His dying words. He looked into D'Angelo's face and said, 'You no-good! You deserve to die for what you did!' "

"He looked into D'Angelo's face—but how do you know it was D'Angelo he was seeing? He was in delirium from the weakness and the pain, and before his eyes he wasn't seeing any D'Angelo, he wasn't seeing this world that the rest of us are living in. He was seeing the world he'd been looking at before he got sick, the world that meant the most to him—he was seeing the world of the opera, what else? And what was happening up there on that stage just before the poison hit him? The no-good villain was making advances to the beautiful heroine, and she was struggling to defend herself, and pretty soon she was going to kill him—and Cohen, seeing that villain in front of his eyes, shouted out at him, 'You no-good! You deserve to die for what you did!'"

Mom was silent for a moment, and then she went on in a lower voice, "An opera lover will go on being an opera lover—right up to the end."

She went out to the kitchen for the coffee, and I went to the phone in the hall to call the Homicide Squad.

When I got back to the table, Mom was seated and the coffee was served. She took a few sips,

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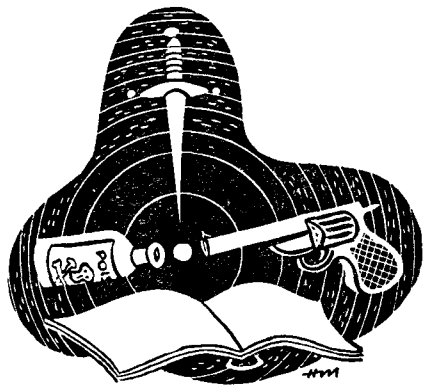
and then gave a little sigh. "Poor old Cohen—such a terrible way to go!"

"Death by poisoning *is* pretty painful," I said.

"Poisoning?" Mom blinked up at me. "Yes, this is terrible too. But the worst part of all—the poor man died fifteen minutes too soon. He never heard Tebaldi sing the *Vissy darty.*"

And Mom began to hum softly.

EDITORS' NOTE: The next *new* Mom story is in! It is titled *Mom and the Haunted Mink*, and will appear in EQMM soon . . .



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the *NEWEST* short-short by

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

Every day that Jane went marketing she forgot to buy pepper. Then Mike, who liked pepper with his meals, tied a black thread around her finger—old-fashioned methods were best, he said, with an old-fashioned mother like Jane . . .

A MATTER OF TIMING

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

JANE PAID FOR THE GROCERIES AND looked at the wall clock. Good. She had made it. She put the paper bag on her left hip.

"It's not too heavy," she said kindly to the boy who offered to help.

She batted through the door and out into the sunshine, her mind running down its list, in case she had forgotten something important.

There was a black thread tied around her right forefinger. Mike had tied it there, this morning, over the breakfast eggs. Black was for pepper. They had been out of pepper for four days.

Jane didn't like pepper. Mike said that explained it—she wasn't motivated. Jane said she had it written down on her shopping lists, but every time she went to market, she forgot to take the list.

So Mike had tied the black thread around her finger, telling their daughter Sally that old-fashioned methods were sometimes best, especially with an old-fashioned character like Mommy. Sally had thought Daddy was a riot.

Smiling to herself, Jane resolved that the thread would be removed at dinner with all due ceremony. Yes, she had the pepper. She was a good housekeeper; she didn't always remember everything, but then, who did?

Jane pranced around the corner of the building into the parking lot. Her car was over there. How strange that one always remembers where one leaves a car. Memory is odd, thought Jane; maybe there are instinctive priorities.

She crossed the big lot. It had its usual complement of cars, and a few people were coming in and going out. There was a man standing beside her car—he was tucked in between Jane's and the next one.

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She walked into the slot, toward her driver's seat, saying in her usual friendly fashion, "Excuse me?" The man shuffled and let her pass.

Then he turned and said to her startled ear, "Don't yell, lady, or I'll give it to you." He was a thin, pale, red-eyed man, with a wicked-looking knife in his hand. "Get in, lady. You drive. And do as I say."

Nobody was noticing. A woman in blue was getting into a car at the far end of the lot. Jane didn't yell. She said, "What do you want me to do?"

"I said do as I say. Drive. I'm getting out of here. I said drive."

Jane was remembering, as clear as bells ringing, everything that was really important. She pushed the bag against the car, lifting her knee under it. She put her right hand down into it. She scrabbled inside, watching him. He looked miserable, more frightened than she—but dangerous.

Jane said, "I've got to find my keys, don't I?"

"Hurry up." The knife was pointed at her stomach. He didn't care; she could see that.

And an automobile is not important—not as important as a life.

Jane said, "I'll give you the keys. You want the car, don't you? Take it."

"Nope. Nope. Get in, lady. I'm not leaving you behind. You'd call the cops."

"That's right," she said, "I would."

Jane widened her eyes, holding his gaze. Her thumb had to be strong enough. She felt it scrape past sharp metal and lose skin. "Hah!" she grunted in triumph.

She pulled her hand out of the bag and threw pepper out of the now-open can straight into his eyes. Then Jane hurled herself to the ground.

The man screamed, lunged, tripped over her body, fell, screamed again. Jane crawled out of the parking slot, somehow, anyhow, around him, over him, then out and free.

People had stopped in their tracks, a few on the sidewalk, the few who were getting in or out of cars. Jane ran. A man stepped into her way and said, "What's the matter with him? Is he having a fit? Call an ambulance."

"He's got a knife! Call the police!"

People seemed to have come up out of the ground like worms after a rain. None of them went near the man. They had stunned looks—looks of distaste—don't-bother-me looks. The woman in blue slammed her car door and frantically tried to start her engine.

The man in the parking slot was now on his feet, blind and blundering, seeking the way out. People's feet were nervous, but nobody moved.

Jane moved. She ran back into the grocery store.

She was on the phone when the man with the knife, staggering, stabbing the air, stumbled blindly be-

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hind the car of the woman in blue and down under her wheels as she, in panic, was trying desperately to get the motor going.

The cops came with a rush.

People said to Jane, "You were so quick." "You were so smart." "You were so brave."

Jane said, "But I couldn't go off with him."

"You could have been hurt, maybe killed."

Jane said, "No. I couldn't let him stab me—I just couldn't."

"Lucky you had just bought some pepper."

Jane said impatiently, "I'd have thought of something else. I'd have stabbed his knife with my roast of beef. What time is it?"

"I'd have been scared to death!" a woman exclaimed.

"I didn't have *time,*" Jane said.

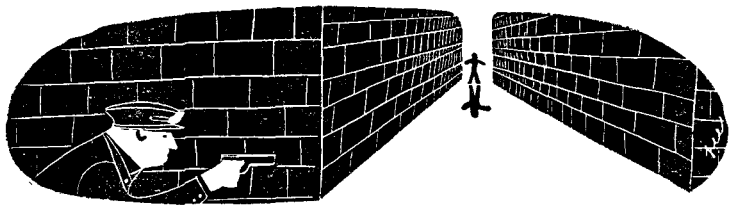
The woman in blue was having hysterics in the parking lot. The cop said to Jane, "You did okay, Ma'am."

"I'd like to go home now," Jane said to him. "You can come there and talk all you want. What time is it?"

"Three twenty-five, Ma'am."

"Then I *must* go! You see, my little girl will be home from school in a few minutes. Children shouldn't come home to an empty house. So, of course, I couldn't go with him, could I?"

"No, Ma'am," the cop said, and he cleared the way for her, tipping his cap.



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Evelyn Waugh's work ranged from serious biographies of poets to diabolically amusing novels of "savage satire"—with "firm and purposeful" travel books published between his more "serious" efforts. An author with a large and appreciative public, Mr. Waugh carried on a noble British-literary tradition: he was cynical and ultra-sophisticated in subject matter, sardonic in manner, innocent and cherubic in appearance.

Edmund Wilson once described Evelyn Waugh as "the only first-rate comic genius that has appeared in England since Bernard Shaw," as a writer who "combines the outrageous with the plausible without offending our sense of truth." Witness Mr. Waugh's VILE BODIES, A HANDFUL OF DUST, SCOOP, BRIDESHEAD REVISITED, *and* THE LOVED ONE . . .

We are indebted to J. R. Christopher of Norman, Oklahoma, for reminding us about Evelyn Waugh's "Tactical Exercise," an ironic study in the "tactics" of murder . . .

TACTICAL EXERCISE

by EVELYN WAUGH

JOHN VERNEY MARRIED ELIZABETH in 1938, but it was not until the winter of 1945 that he came to hate her steadily and fiercely. There had been countless brief gusts of hate before this, for it was a thing which came easily to him. He was not what is normally described as a bad-tempered man, rather the reverse; a look of fatigue and abstraction was the only visible sign of the passion which possessed him, as others are possessed by laughter or desire, several times a day.

During the war he passed among those he served with as a phlegmatic fellow. He did not have his good or his bad days: they were all uniformly good or bad; good in that he did what had to be done, expeditiously without ever "getting in a flap" or "going off the deep end"; bad from the intermittent, invisible sheet-lightning of hate which flashed and flickered deep inside him at every obstruction or reverse.

In his orderly room when, as a company commander, he faced the morning procession of defaulters and malingerers; in the mess when the subalterns disturbed his reading by playing the radio; at the Staff College when the "syndicate" dis-

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agreed with his solution; at Brigade H.Q. when the staff-sergeant mislaid a file or the telephone orderly muddled a call; when the driver of his car missed a turning; later, in hospital, when the doctor seemed to look too cursorily at his wound and the nurses stood gossiping jauntily at the beds of more likable patients instead of doing their duty to him—in all the annoyances of army life which others dismissed with an oath and a shrug, John Verney's eyelids drooped wearily, a tiny grenade of hate exploded, and the fragments rang and ricocheted round the steel walls of his mind.

There had been less to annoy him before the war. He had some money and the hope of a career in politics. Before marriage he served his apprenticeship to the Liberal party in two hopeless by-elections. The Central Office then rewarded him with a constituency in outer London which offered a fair chance in the next general election.

In the eighteen months before the war he nursed this constituency from his flat in Belgravia and traveled frequently on the Continent to study political conditions. These studies convinced him that war was inevitable; he denounced the Munich agreement pungently and secured a commission in the Territorial Army.

Into this peacetime life Elizabeth fitted unobtrusively. She was his second cousin. In 1938 she had reached the age of 26, four years his junior, without falling in love. She was a calm, handsome young woman, an only child, with some money of her own and more to come. As a girl, in her first season, an injudicious remark, let slip and overheard, got her the reputation of cleverness. Those who knew her best ruthlessly called her "deep."

Thus condemned to social failure, she languished in the ballrooms of Pont Street for another year and then settled down to a life of concert-going and shopping with her mother, until she surprised her small circle of friends by marrying John Verney. Courtship and consummation were tepid, cousinly, harmonious. They agreed, in face of coming war, to remain childless. No one knew what Elizabeth felt or thought about anything. Her judgments were mainly negative, deep or dull as you cared to take them. She had none of the appearance of a woman likely to inflame great hate.

John Verney was discharged from the Army early in 1945 with a M.C. and one leg, for the future, two inches shorter than the other. He found Elizabeth living in Hampstead with her parents. She had kept him informed by letter of the changes in her condition, but, preoccupied, he had not clearly imagined them. Their flat had been requisitioned by a government office; their furniture and books sent to a repository and totally lost, partly burned by a bomb, partly pillaged by firemen. Elizabeth, who

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was a linguist, had gone to work in a clandestine branch of the Foreign Office.

Her parents' house had once been a substantial Georgian villa overlooking the Heath. John Verney arrived there early in the morning after a crowded night's journey from Liverpool. The wrought-iron railings and gates had been rudely torn away by the salvage collectors, and in the front garden, once so neat, weeds and shrubs grew in a rank jungle trampled at night by courting soldiers.

The back garden was a single, small bomb crater; heaped clay, statuary, and the bricks and glass of ruined greenhouses; dry stalks of willow herb stood breast high over the mounds. All the windows were gone from the back of the house, replaced by shutters of card and board, which put the main rooms in perpetual darkness. "Welcome to Chaos and Old Night," Elizabeth's father said genially.

There were no servants; the old had fled, the young had been conscribed for service. Elizabeth made him some tea before leaving for her office.

Here he lived—lucky, Elizabeth told him, to have a home. Furniture was unprocurable, furnished flats commanded a price beyond their income, which was now taxed to a bare wage. They might have found something in the country, but Elizabeth, being childless, could not get release from her work. Moreover, he had his constituency.

This, too, was transformed. A factory wired round like a prisoner-of-war camp stood in the public gardens. The streets surrounding it—once the trim houses of potential Liberals—had been bombed, patched, confiscated, and filled with an immigrant proletarian population. Every day he received a heap of complaining letters from constituents exiled in provincial boarding houses. He had hoped that his decoration and his limp might earn him sympathy, but he found the new inhabitants indifferent to the fortunes of war. Instead they showed a skeptical curiosity about Social Security. "They're nothing but a lot of Reds," said the Liberal agent.

"You mean I won't get in?"

"Well, we'll give them a good fight. The Tories are putting up a Battle-of-Britain pilot. I'm afraid he'll get most of what's left of the middle-class vote."

In the event John Verney came bottom of the poll, badly. A rancorous schoolteacher was elected. The Central Office paid his deposit, but the election had cost him dear. And when it was over there was absolutely nothing for John Verney to do.

He remained in Hampstead, helped make the beds after Elizabeth had gone to her office, limped to the green-grocer and fishmonger, and stood, full of hate, in the queues;

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he helped Elizabeth wash up at night. They ate in the kitchen, where Elizabeth's mother cooked deliciously the scanty rations. Elizabeth's father went three days a week to help pack parcels for Java.

Elizabeth, the deep one, never spoke of her work, which, in fact, was concerned with setting up hostile and oppressive governments in Eastern Europe. One evening at a restaurant, a man came and spoke to her, a tall young man whose sallow, aquiline face was full of intellect and humor. "That's the head of my department," she said. "He's so amusing."

"Looks like a Conservative."

"I believe he is. He hates the work," she added hastily, for since his defeat in the election John had become fiercely anti-political.

"There is absolutely no need to work for the State now," he said. "The war's over."

"Our work is just beginning. They won't let any of us go. You must understand what conditions are in this country."

It often fell to Elizabeth to explain "conditions" to him. Strand by strand, knot by knot, through the coalless winter, she exposed the vast net of governmental control which had been woven in his absence.

He had been reared in traditional Liberalism and the system revolted him. More than this, it had him caught, personally, tripped up, tied, tangled; wherever he wanted to go, whatever he wanted to do or have done, he found himself baffled and frustrated. And as Elizabeth explained she found herself defending. This regulation was necessary to avoid that ill; such a country was suffering, as Britain was not, for having neglected such a precaution; and so on, calmly and reasonably.

"I know it's maddening, John, but you must realize it's the same for everyone."

"That's what all you bureaucrats want," he said. "Equality through slavery. The two-class state—proletarians and officials."

Elizabeth was part and parcel of it. She worked for the State. She was a collaborator with the new, alien, occupying power. And as the winter wore on and the gas burned feebly in the stove, and the rain blew in through the patched windows, as at length spring came and buds broke in the obscene wilderness round the house, Elizabeth in his mind became something more important. She became a symbol.

For just as soldiers in far-distant camps think of their wives, with a tenderness they seldom felt at home, as the embodiment of all the good things they have left behind—wives who perhaps were scolds and drabs, but in the desert and jungle become transfigured until their trite air-letters become texts of hope—so Elizabeth grew in John Verney's despairing mind to more than human malevolence as the archpriestess

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and maenad of the century of the common man.

"You aren't looking well, John," Elizabeth's mother said. "You and Elizabeth ought to get away for a bit. She is due for leave at Easter."

"The State is granting her a supplementary ration of her husband's company, you mean. Are we sure she has filled in all the correct forms? Or are commissars of her rank above such things?"

Elizabeth's parents laughed uneasily. John made his little jokes with such an air of weariness, with such a droop of the eyelids that they sometimes struck chill in that family circle. Elizabeth regarded him gravely and silently.

John was far from well. His leg was in constant pain so that he no longer stood in queues. He slept badly; as also, for the first time in her life, did Elizabeth. They shared a room now, for the winter rains had brought down ceilings in many parts of the shaken house, and the upper rooms were thought to be unsafe. They had twin beds on the ground floor in what had once been her father's library.

In the first days of his homecoming John had been amorous. Now he never approached her. They lay night after night six feet apart in the darkness. Once when John had been awake for two hours he turned on the lamp that stood on the table between them. Elizabeth was lying with her eyes wide open staring at the ceiling.

"I'm sorry. Did I wake you?"

"I haven't been asleep."

"I thought I'd read for a bit. Will it disturb you?"

"Not at all."

She turned away. John read for an hour. He did not know whether she was awake or asleep when he turned off the light.

Often after that he longed to put on the light, but was afraid to find her awake and staring. Instead he lay, as others lie in a luxurious rapture of love, hating her.

It did not occur to him to leave her; or, rather, it did occur from time to time, but he hopelessly dismissed the thought. Her life was bound tight to his; her family was his family; their finances were intertangled and their expectations lay together in the same quarters. To leave her would be to start fresh, alone and naked in a strange world; and lame and weary at the age of 38, John Verney had not the heart to move.

He loved no one else. He had nowhere to go, nothing to do. Moreover he suspected, of late, that it would not hurt her if he went. And, above all, the single steadfast desire left to him was to do her ill.

"I wish she were dead," he said to himself as he lay awake at night. "I wish she were dead."

Sometimes they went out together. As the winter passed, John took to dining once or twice a week at his club. He assumed that on these occasions she stayed at home, but

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one morning he learned that she too had dined out the evening before. He did not ask with whom, but her mother did, and Elizabeth replied, "Just someone from the office."

"The man in the restaurant?" John asked.

"As a matter of fact, it was."

"I hope you enjoyed it."

"Quite. A beastly dinner, of course, but he's very amusing."

One night when he returned from his club, after a dismal little dinner and two crowded Tube journeys, he found Elizabeth in bed and deeply asleep. She did not stir when he entered. Unlike her normal habit, she was snoring.

He stood for a minute, fascinated by this new and unlovely aspect of her, her head thrown back, her mouth open and slightly dribbling at the corner. Then he shook her. She muttered something, turned over, and slept heavily and soundlessly.

Half an hour later, as he was striving to compose himself for sleep, she began to snore again. He turned on the light, looked at her more closely, and noticed with surprise, which suddenly changed to joyous hope, that there was a tube of unfamiliar pills, half empty, beside her on the bed table.

He examined it. "*24 Comprimés narcotiques, hypnotiques,*" he read, and then in large scarlet letters, "*Ne Pas Depasser Deux.*" He counted those which were left. Eleven.

With tremulous butterfly wings hope began to flutter in his heart, became a certainty. He felt a fire kindle and spread inside him until he was deliciously suffused in every limb and organ. He lay, listening to the snores, with the pure excitement of a child on Christmas Eve.

"I shall wake up tomorrow and find her dead," he told himself, as once he had felt the flaccid stocking at the foot of his bed and told himself, "Tomorrow I shall wake up and find it full."

Like a child, he longed to sleep to hasten the morning and, like a child, he was wildly, ecstatically sleepless. Presently he swallowed two of the pills himself and almost at once was unconscious.

Elizabeth always rose first to make breakfast for the family. She was at the dressing table when sharply, without drowsiness, his memory stereoscopically clear about the incidents of the night before, John awoke.

"You've been snoring," she said.

Disappointment was so intense that at first he could not speak. Then he said, "You snored, too, last night."

"It must be the sleeping tablet I took. I must say it gave me a good night."

"Only one?"

"Yes, two's the most that's safe."

"Where did you get them?"

"A friend at the office. He has them prescribed by a doctor for when he's working too hard. I told

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him I wasn't sleeping, so he gave me half a bottle."

"Could he get me some?"

"I expect so. He can do most things like that."

So John and Elizabeth began to drug themselves regularly and passed long vacuous nights. But often John delayed, letting the beatific pill lie beside his glass of water; while knowing the vigil was terminable at will, he postponed the joy of unconsciousness, heard Elizabeth's snores, and hated her sumptuously.

One evening while the plans for the holiday were still under discussion, John and Elizabeth went to the cinema. The film was a murder story of no great ingenuity but with showy scenery. A bride murdered her husband by throwing him out of a window, down a cliff. Things were made easy for her by his taking a lonely lighthouse for their honeymoon. He was very rich and she wanted his money. All she had to do was confide in the local doctor and a few neighbors that her husband frightened her by walking in his sleep; she doped his coffee, dragged him from the bed to the balcony—a feat of some strength—where she had already broken away a yard of balustrade, and rolled him over. Then she went back to bed, gave the alarm next morning, and wept over the mangled body which was presently discovered half awash on the rocks. Retribution overtook her later, but at the time the thing was a complete success.

"I wish it were as easy as that," thought John, and in a few hours the whole tale had floated away in those lightless attics of the mind where films and dreams and funny stories lie spider-shrouded for a lifetime unless, as sometimes happens, an intruder brings them to light.

Such a thing happened a few weeks later when John and Elizabeth went for their holiday. Elizabeth had found the place.

It belonged to someone in her office. It was named Good Hope Fort, and stood on the Cornish coast. "It's only just been dereq-uisitioned," she said. "I expect we shall find it in pretty bad condition."

"We're used to that," said John. It did not occur to him that she should spend her leave anywhere but with him. She was as much part of him as his maimed and aching leg.

They arrived on a gusty April afternoon after a train journey of normal discomfort. A taxi drove them eight miles from the station, through deep Cornish lanes, past granite cottages and disused, archaic tin workings.

They reached the village which gave the house its postal address, passed through it and out along a road which suddenly emerged from its high banks into open grazing land on the cliff's edge, high, swift clouds and sea birds wheeling overhead, the turf at their feet alive with fluttering wild flowers, salt in

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the air, below them the roar of the Atlantic breaking on the rocks, a middle-distance of indigo and white tumbled waters and beyond, the serene arc of the horizon. Here was the house.

"Your father," said John, "would now say, 'Your castle hath a pleasant seat.'"

"Well, it has rather, hasn't it?"

It was a small stone building on the very edge of the cliff, built a century or so ago for defensive purposes, converted to a private house in the years of peace, taken again by the Navy during the war as a signal station, now once more reverting to gentler uses. Some coils of rusty wire, a mast, the concrete foundations of a hut, gave evidence of its former masters.

They carried their things into the house and paid the taxi.

"A woman comes up every morning from the village. I said we shouldn't want her this evening. I see she's left us some oil for the lamps. She's got a fire going too, bless her, and plenty of wood. Oh, and look what I've got as a present from father. I promised not to tell you until we arrived. A bottle of whiskey. Wasn't it sweet of him. He's been hoarding his ration for three months."

Elizabeth talked brightly as she began to arrange the luggage. "There's a room for each of us. This is the only proper living room, but there's a study in case you feel like doing any work. I believe we shall be quite comfortable."

The living room was built with two stout bays, each with a French window opening on a balcony which overhung the sea. John opened one and the sea wind filled the room. He stepped out, breathed deeply, and then said suddenly, "Hullo, this is dangerous."

At one place, between the windows, the cast-iron balustrade had broken away and the stone ledge lay open over the cliff. He looked at the gap and at the foaming rocks below, momentarily puzzled. The irregular polyhedron of memory rolled uncertainly and came to rest.

He had been here before, a few weeks ago, on the gallery of the lighthouse in that swiftly forgotten film. He stood there, looking down. It was exactly thus that the waves had come swirling over the rocks, had broken and dropped back with the spray falling about them. This was the sound they had made; this was the broken ironwork and the sheer edge.

Elizabeth was still talking in the room, her voice drowned by wind and sea. John returned to the room, shut and fastened the door. In the quiet she was saying ". . . only got the furniture out of storage last week. He left the woman from the village to arrange it. She's got some queer ideas, I must say. Just look where she put . . ."

"What did you say this house was called?"

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"Good Hope."

"A good name."

That evening John drank a glass of his father-in-law's whiskey, smoked a pipe, and planned. He had been a good tactician. He made a leisurely, mental "appreciation of the situation." Object: murder.

When they rose to go to bed he asked, "You packed the sleeping tablets?"

"Yes, a new tube. But I am sure I won't need any tonight."

"Neither shall I," said John, "the air is wonderful."

During the following days he considered the tactical problem. It was entirely simple. He had the "staff-solution" already. He considered it in the words and form he had used in the Army. ". . . Courses open to the enemy . . . achievement of surprise . . . consolidation of success." The staff-solution was exemplary. At the beginning of the first week he began to put it into execution.

Already, by easy stages, he had made himself known in the village. Elizabeth was a friend of the owner; he the returned hero, still a little strange in civvy street. "The first holiday my wife and I have had together for six years," he told them in the golf club and, growing more confidential at the bar, hinted that they were thinking of making up for lost time and starting a family.

On another evening he spoke of war strain, of how in this war the civilians had had a worse time of it than the services. His wife, for instance; stuck it all through the blitz; office work all day, bombs at night. She ought to get right away, alone somewhere for a long stretch; her nerves had suffered; nothing serious, but to tell the truth he wasn't quite happy about it. As a matter of fact, he had found her walking in her sleep once or twice in London.

His companions knew of similar cases; nothing to worry about, but it wanted watching; didn't want it to develop into anything worse. Had she seen a doctor?

Not yet, John said. In fact, she didn't know she had been sleepwalking. He had got her back to bed without waking her. He hoped the sea air would do her good. In fact, she seemed much better already. If she showed any more signs of the trouble when they got home he knew a very good man to take her to.

The golf club was full of sympathy. John asked if there were a good doctor in the neighborhood. Yes, they said, old Mackenzie in the village, a first-class man, wasted in a little place like this; not at all a stick-in-the-mud. Read the latest books; psychology and all that. They couldn't think why Old Mac had never specialized and made a name for himself.

"I think I might go and talk to Old Mac about it," said John.

"Do. You couldn't find a better fellow."

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Elizabeth had a fortnight's leave. There were still three days to go when John went off to the village to consult Dr. Mackenzie. He found a gray-haired, genial bachelor in a consulting room that was more like a lawyer's office than a physician's, book-lined, dark, permeated by tobacco smoke.

Seated in the shabby leather armchair he developed in more precise language the story he had told in the golf club. Dr. Mackenzie listened without comment.

"It's the first time I've run against anything like this," John concluded.

At length Dr. Mackenzie said, "You got pretty badly knocked about in the war, Mr. Verney?"

"My knee. It still gives me trouble."

"Bad time in the hospital?"

"Three months. A beastly place outside Rome."

"There's always a good deal of nervous shock in an injury of that kind. It often persists when the wound is healed."

"Yes, but I don't quite understand . . ."

"My dear Mr. Verney, your wife asked me to say nothing about it, but I think I must tell you that she has already been here to consult me on this matter."

"About her sleepwalking? But she can't . . ." Then John stopped.

"My dear fellow, I quite understand. She thought you didn't know. Twice lately you've been out of bed and she had to lead you back. She knows all about it."

John could find nothing to say.

"It's not the first time," Dr. Mackenzie continued, "that I've been consulted by patients who have told me their own symptoms and said they had come on behalf of friends or relations. Usually it's girls who think they're in a family way. It's an interesting feature of your case that you should want to ascribe the trouble to someone else, probably the decisive feature. I've given your wife the name of a man in London who I think will be able to help you. Meanwhile, I can advise plenty of exercise, light meals at night . . ."

John Verney limped back to Good Hope Fort in a state of consternation. Security had been compromised; the operation must be cancelled; initiative had been lost . . . all the phrases of the tactical school came to his mind, but he was still numb after this unexpected reverse. A vast and naked horror peeped at him and was thrust aside.

When he got back, Elizabeth was setting the supper table. He stood on the balcony and stared at the gaping rails with eyes smarting with disappointment. It was dead calm that evening. The rising tide lapped and fell and mounted again silently among the rocks below. He stood gazing down, then he turned back into the room.

There was one large drink left in the whiskey bottle. He poured it

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out and swallowed it. Elizabeth brought in the supper and they sat down. Gradually his mind grew a little calmer. They usually ate in silence. At last he said, "Elizabeth, why did you tell the doctor I had been walking in my sleep?"

She quietly put down the plate she had been holding and looked at him curiously. "Why?" she said gently. "Because I was worried, of course. I didn't think you knew about it."

"But have I been?"

"Oh, yes, several times—in London and here. I didn't think it mattered at first, but the night before last I found you on the balcony, quite near that dreadful hole in the rails. I was really frightened. But it's going to be all right now. Dr. Mackenzie has given me the name . . ."

It was possible, thought John Verney; nothing was more likely.

He had lived night and day for ten days thinking of that opening, of the sea and rock below, the ragged ironwork and the sharp edge of stone. He suddenly felt defeated, sick and stupid, as he had when he lay on the Italian hillside with his smashed knee. Then as now he had felt weariness even more than pain.

"Coffee, darling?"

Suddenly he roused himself. "No," he almost shouted. "No, no, no!"

"Darling, what is the matter? Don't get excited. Are you feeling ill? Lie down on the sofa near the window."

He did as he was told. He felt so weary that he could barely move from his chair.

"Do you think coffee would keep you awake, love? You look quite fit to drop already. There, lie down."

He lay down, and like the tide slowly mounting among the rocks below, sleep rose and spread in his mind. He nodded and woke with a start.

"Shall I open the window, darling, and give you some air?"

"Elizabeth," he said, "I feel as if I have been drugged."

Like the rocks below the window —now awash, now emerging clear from falling water; now awash again, deeper; now barely visible, mere patches on the face of gently eddying foam—his brain was softly drowning. He roused himself, as children do in nightmare, still scared, still half asleep.

"I can't be drugged," he said loudly, "I never touched the coffee."

"Drugs in the coffee?" said Elizabeth gently, like a nurse soothing a fractious child. "Drugs in the *coffee?* What an absurd idea. That's the kind of thing that only happens in the films, darling."

He did not hear her. He was fast asleep, snoring stertorously by the open window.

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the *NEWEST* story by

ROBERT BLOCH

Recently we read a definition of "Camp" (Susan Sontag's?). Something is "Campy" when it's so "far out" that it's "in," so "bad" that it's "good"—or put another way, so lacking in culture that it is culture. (Norman Mailer has defined Camp as "the art of the cannibal, the art which evolved out of the bankruptcy of the novel of manners.")

But is Camp, or even Campiness, truly the most representative symbol of our Twentieth Century civilization? We don't believe it; perhaps more accurately, we don't want to believe it . . .

LIFE IN OUR TIME

by ROBERT BLOCH

WHEN HARRY'S TIME CAPSULE arrived, Jill made him put it in the guest-house.

All it was, it turned out, was a big metal box with a cover that could be sealed tight and soldered so that the air couldn't get at what was inside. Jill was really quite disappointed with it.

But then she was quite disappointed with Harry, too—Professor Harrison Cramer, B.A., B.S., M.A., Ph.D. Half the alphabet wasted on a big nothing. At those flaky faculty cocktail parties, people were always telling her, "It must be wonderful to be married to a brilliant man like your husband." Brother, if they only knew!

It wasn't just that Harry was 15 years older than she was. After all, look at Rex Harrison and Richard Burton and Cary Grant and Lawrence Olivier. But Harry wasn't the movie-star type—definitely not! Not even the mad-scientist type, like Vincent Price in those crazy "campy" pictures. He was nothing —just a big nothing.

Of course, Jill got the message long before she married him. But he did have that imposing house and all that loot he'd inherited from his mother. Jill figured on making a few changes, and she actually did manage to redo the house so that it looked halfway presentable, with the help of that *fagilleh* interior decorator. But she couldn't redo Harry. Maybe *he* needed an interior decorator to work on him, too; *she* certainly couldn't change him.

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And outside of what she managed to squeeze out of him for the redecorating, Jill hadn't been able to get her hands on any of the loot, either. Harry wasn't interested in entertaining or going out or taking cruises, and whenever she mentioned a sable jacket he mumbled something under his breath about "conspicuous consumption"—whatever that was! He didn't like modern art or the theater, he didn't drink or smoke—why, he didn't even watch TV. And he wore flannel pajamas in bed. *All* the time.

After a couple of months Jill was ready to climb the walls. Then she began thinking about Reno, and that's where Rick came in. Rick was her attorney—at least, that's the way it started out to be, but Rick had other ideas. Particularly for those long afternoons when Harry was lecturing at seminars or whatever he did over there at the University.

Pretty soon Jill forgot about Reno; Rick was all for one of those quickie divorces you can get down in Mexico. He was sure he could make it stick and still see to it that she got her fifty-fifty share under the community property laws, and without any waiting. It could all be done in 24 hours, with no hassle; they'd take off together, just like eloping. Bang, you're divorced; bang, you're remarried; and then, bang, bang, bang—

So all Jill had to worry about was finding the right time. And even that was no problem, after Harry told her about the time capsule.

"I'm to be in full charge of the project," he said. "Complete authority to choose what will be representative of our present culture. Quite a responsibility, my dear—but I welcome the challenge."

"So what's a time capsule?" Jill wanted to know.

Harry went into a long routine and she didn't really listen, just enough to get the general idea. The thing was, Harry had to pick out all kinds of junk to be sealed up in this gizmo so that sometime—10,000 years from now, maybe—somebody would come along and dig it up and open it and be able to tell what kind of civilization we had. Big deal! But from the way Harry went on, you'd think he'd just won the Grand Prix or something.

"We're going to put the capsule in the foundation of the new Humanities Building," he told her.

"What are humanities?" Jill asked, but Harry just gave her one of those *Good-lord-how-can-you-be-so-stupid?* looks that always seemed to start their quarrels; and they would have had a fight then and there, too, only he added something about how the dedication ceremonies for the new building would take place on May 1st, and he'd have to hurry to get everything arranged for the big day. Including writing his dedicatory address.

May 1st was all Jill needed to

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hear. That was on a Friday, and if Harry was going to be tied up making a speech at the dedication, it would be an A-OK time to make that little flight across the border. So she managed to call Rick and tell him and he said yeah, sure, perfect.

"It's only ten days from now," Jill reminded Rick. "We've got a lot to do."

She didn't know it, but it turned out she wasn't kidding. She had more to do than she thought, because all at once Harry was *interested* in her. *Really* interested.

"You've got to help me," he said that night at dinner. "I want to rely on your taste. Of course, I've got some choices of my own in mind, but I want *you* to suggest items to go into the capsule."

At first Jill thought he was putting her on, but he really meant it. "This project is going to be honest. The usual ploy is pure exhibitionism —samples of the 'best' of everything, plus descriptive data which is really just a pat on the back for the *status quo ante*. Well, that's not for me. I'd like to include material that's self-explanatory, not self-congratulatory. Not art and facts—but artifacts."

Harry lost her there, until he said, "Everything preserved will be a clue to our contemporary social attitudes. Not what we *pretend* to admire, but what the majority actually *believes in* and *enjoys*. And that's where you come in, my dear. You represent the majority."

Jill began to dig it, then. "You mean like TV and pop records?"

"Exactly. What's that album you like so much? The one with the four hermaphrodites on the liner?"

"Who?"

"Excuse me—it's purportedly a singing group, isn't it?"

"Oh, you're talking about the Poodles!" Jill went and got the album, which was called "The Poodles Bark Again." The sound really turned her on, but she had always thought Harry hated it. And now he was coming on all smiles.

"Great!" he said. "This definitely goes in."

"But—"

"Don't worry, I'll buy you another." He took the album and put it on his desk. "Now, you mentioned something about television. What's your favorite program?"

When she saw that he was really serious, she began telling him about "Anywhere, U.S.A." What it was, it was about life in a small town, just an ordinary suburb like, but the people were great. There was this couple with the two kids, one boy and one girl, sort of an average family, you might say, only he was kind of playing around with a divorcee who ran a *discothetique* or whatever they call them, and she had a yen for her psychiatrist—he wasn't really *her* psychiatrist, he

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was analyzing one of the kids, the one who had set fire to the high school gymnasium, not the girl—she was afraid her parents would find out about her affair with the vice-principal who was really an enemy agent only she didn't know it yet, and her real boy friend, the one who had the brain operation, had a "thing" about his mother, so—

It got kind of complicated, but Harry kept asking her to tell him more, and pretty soon he was smiling and nodding. "Wonderful! We'll have to see if we can get films of a typical week's episodes."

"You mean you really want something like that?"

"Of course. Wouldn't you say this show faithfully captured the lives of American citizens today?"

She had to agree he was right. Also about some of the things he was going to put into the capsule to show the way people lived nowadays—like tranquilizers and pep pills and income tax forms and a map of the freeway-expressway-turnpike system. He had a lot of numbers, too, for Zip Code and digit dialing, and Social Security, and the ones the computers punched out on insurance and charge-account and utility bills.

But what he really wanted was ideas for more stuff, and in the next couple of days he kept leaning on her. He got hold of her souvenir from Shady Lawn Cemetry—it was a plastic walnut that opened up, called "Shady Lawn in a Nutshell." Inside were twelve tiny color prints showing all the tourist attractions of the place, and you could mail the whole thing to your friends back home. Harry put this in the time capsule, wrapping it up in something he told her was an actuarial table on the incidence of coronary occlusion among middle-aged, middle-class males. Like heart attacks, that is.

"What's that you're reading?" he asked. And the next thing she knew, he had her copy of the latest Steve Slash paperback—the one where Steve is sent on this top-secret mission to keep peace in Port Said, and right after he kills these five guys with the portable flame thrower concealed in his judo belt, he's getting ready to play beddy-bye with Yasmina, who's really another secret agent with radioactive fingernails—

And that's as far as she'd got when he grabbed the book. It was getting so she couldn't keep anything out of his eager little hands.

"What's that you're cooking?" he wanted to know. And there went the TV dinner—frozen *crêpes suzettes* and all. To say nothing of the Plain Jane Instant Borscht.

"Where's that photo you had of your brother?" It was a real nothing picture of Stud, just him wearing that beatnik beard of his and standing by his motorcycle on the day he passed his initiation into Hell's Angels. But Harry put *that* in, too.

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Jill didn't think it was very nice of Harry, seeing as how he clipped it to another photo of some guys taking the Ku Klux Klan oath.

But right now the main thing was to keep Harry happy. That's what Rick said when she clued him in on what was going on.

"Cooperate, baby," he told her. "It's a real kinky kick, but it keeps him out of our hair. We got plans to make, tickets to buy, packing and like that there."

The trouble was, Jill ran out of ideas. She explained this to Rick but he just laughed.

"I'll give you some," he said, "and you can feed 'em to him. He's a real way-out kid, that husband of yours—I know just what he wants."

The funny part of it was that Rick did know. He was really kind of a brain himself, but not in a kooky way like Harry. So she listened to what he suggested and told Harry when she got home.

"How about a sample of the Theater of the Absurd?" she asked. Harry looked at her over the top of his glasses, and for a minute she thought she'd really thrown him, but then he grinned and got excited.

"Perfect!" he said. "Any suggestions?"

"Well, I was reading a review about this new play everybody's talking about—it's about this guy who thinks he's having a baby so he goes to an abortionist, only I guess the abortionist is supposed to be somebody mystical or something, and it all takes place in a greenhouse—"

"Delightful!" Harry was off and running. "I'll pick up a copy of the book. Anything else?"

Thank God that Rick had coached her. So she said what about a recording of one of those concerts where they use a "prepared" piano that makes noises like screeching brakes, or sometimes no sound at all. And Harry liked that. He also liked the idea about a sample of Pop Art—maybe a big blowup of a newspaper ad about "That Tired Feeling" or maybe "Psoriasis."

The next day she suggested a tape of a "Happening" which was the real thing, because it took place in some private sanatorium for disturbed patients, and Harry got really enthusiastic about this idea.

And the next day she came up with that new foreign movie with the long title she couldn't pronounce. Rick gave her the dope on it—some far-out thing by a Yugoslavian director she never heard of, about a man making a movie about a man making a movie, only you never could be quite sure, in the movie, whether the scene was supposed to be a part of the movie or the movie was a part of what was really happening, *if* it did happen.

Harry went for this, too. In a big way.

"You're wonderful," he said,

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"Truthfully, I never expected this of you."

Jill just gave him her extra-special smile and went on her merry way. It wasn't hard, because he had to go running around town trying to dig up books and films and recordings of all the stuff he had on his list. Which was just how Rick said it would be, leaving everything clear for them to shop and set up their last-minute plans.

"I won't get our tickets until the day before we leave," Rick told her. "We don't want to tip off anything. The way I figure it, Harry'll be moving the capsule over to where they're holding the ceremonies the next morning, so you'll get a chance to pack while he's out of the way." Rick was really something, the way he had it all worked out.

And that's the way it went. The day before the ceremony, Harry was busy in the guest-house all afternoon, packing his goodies in the time capsule. Just like a dopey squirrel burying nuts. Only even dopey squirrels don't put stuff away for another squirrel to dig up 10,000 years from now.

Harry hadn't even had time to look at her the past two days, but this didn't bother Jill any. Along about suppertime she went out to call him, but he said he wasn't hungry and besides he had to run over and arrange for the trucking company to come and haul the capsule over to the foundation site. They'd dug a big hole there for tomorrow morning, and he was going to take the capsule to it and stand guard over it until it was time for the dedication ceremonies.

That was even better news than Jill had hoped for, so as soon as Harry left for the trucking company she phoned Rick and gave him the word. He said he'd be right over with the tickets.

So of course Jill had to get dressed. She put on her girdle and the fancy bra and her high heels; then she went in the bathroom and used her depilatory and touched up her hair where the rinse was fading, and put on her eyelashes and brushed her teeth, and attached those new fingernails after she got her makeup on and the perfume.

When she looked at the results in the mirror she was really proud of herself; for the first time in months she felt like her real self again. And from now on it would always be this way—with Rick.

There was a good moment with Rick there in the bedroom after he came in, but of course Harry *would* drive up right then—she heard the car out front and broke the clinch just in time, telling Rick to sneak out the back way. Harry would be busy with the truckers for at least a couple of minutes.

Jill forced herself to wait in the bedroom until she was sure the coast was clear. She kept looking out the window but it was too dark now to see anything. Since there

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wasn't any noise, she figured Harry must have taken the truckers into the guest-house.

And that's where she finally went.

Only the truckers weren't there. Just Harry.

"I told them to wait until first thing in the morning," he said. "Changed my mind when I realized how damp it was—no sense my spending the night shivering outside in the cold. Besides, I haven't sealed the capsule yet—remembered a couple of things I wanted to add."

He took a little bottle out of his pocket and carried it over to the time capsule. "This goes in too. Carefully labeled, of course, so they can analyze it."

"The bottle's empty," Jill said.

Harry shook his head. "Not at all. It contains smog. That's right—smog, from the freeway. I want posterity to know everything about us, right down to the poisonous air in which our contemporary culture breathed its last."

He dropped the bottle into the capsule, then picked up something else from the table next to it. Jill noticed he had a soldering outfit there to seal the lid, ready to plug in after he'd used a pump to suck all the air out. He'd explained about the capsule being airtight, soundproof, duralumin-sheathed, but that didn't interest her now. She kept looking at what he held in his hand.

It was one of those electric carving knives, complete with battery.

"Another Twentieth Century artifact," he said. "Another gadget symbol of our decadence. An electric knife—just the thing for Mom when she carves the fast-frozen, pre-cooked Thanksgiving turkey while she and Dad count all their shiny, synthetic, plastic blessings."

He waved the knife.

"They'll understand," he told her. "Those people in the future will understand it all. They'll know what life was like in our time—how we drained Walden Pond and refilled it with blood, sweat, and tears."

Jill moved a little closer, staring at the knife. "The blade's rusty."

Harry shook his head. "That's not rust," he said.

Jill kept it cool. She kept it right up until the moment she looked over the edge of the big metal box, looked down into it, and saw Rick lying there. Rick was stretched out, and the red was oozing down over the books and records and photos and tapes.

"I was waiting for him when he sneaked out the back of the house," Harry said.

"Then you knew—all along—"

"For quite a while," Harry said. "Long enough to figure things out and make my plans."

"What plans?"

Harry just shrugged. And raised the knife.

A moment later the time capsule received the final specimen of life in the Twentieth Century.

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During the many years that Father Francis Xavier Crumlish served St. Brigid's parish, he had many a scuffle with crime and criminals; but his encounter with the Devil this time was something new, something different—a crime committed during the final dress rehearsal of St. Brigid's annual Spring Revue. Surely the Devil had tempted and got the best of one of Father Crumlish's Flock—but which of his Lambs was a wolf in sheep's clothing?

Another warm, deeply human story of the good pastor's involvement with people and of his God-given talent for—of all things!—the investigation of crime and the detection of criminals . . .

FATHER CRUMLISH AND THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

As a member of the sixth grade aimed a quivering bowstring to attack the final bars of *Humoresque*, Father Francis Xavier Crumlish, seated in the last row of St. Brigid's school auditorium, sighed gratefully and remarked to himself that there was nothing harder on the eardrums than a violin solo. But moments later, when two eighth-graders appeared on the stage, he changed his mind. Indeed there *was* something harder on the eardrums: a violin and piano duet.

The occasion was the final dress rehearsal for the parish's annual Spring Revue, an event scheduled to start promptly at seven o'clock on the following evening. But from past experiences the pastor knew the curtain would certainly not rise until after eight, and then only with the help of God and St. Patrick.

More than twenty years ago Father Crumlish had hit on the idea of raising funds for St. Brigid's perpetually impoverished coffers by putting on what he imagined would be "a little home-grown entertainment." Foolishly he had announced from the pulpit that any talented parishioners, regardless of age, would be eligible to participate, and he had advised all those interested to report to the school auditorium after evening Devotions.

The resulting turnout had laid him low for three days. Never had he imagined that so many of the Lambs in his Flock cherished such a craving to sing, dance, juggle, recite, or play every musical instrument known to mankind. Conse-

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quently, not a year had passed since that long-ago initial venture when he hadn't reproached himself for ever having conceived the idea.

And this year was no different, the old priest reflected. Once again he'd had to suffer through weeks of auditions and rehearsals—and still facing him was the ordeal of tomorrow night's performance. True, the participants might change from year to year, but the bill remained the same. Would he ever live to see a revue which omitted *The Charge of the Light Brigade?*

Father Crumlish swept a gnarled hand over his still-thick snowy crown and gloomily eyed a roped-off area on the far left aisle of the auditorium which was easily accessible to the three steps leading to the stage. It was in this special section that all participants in the revue were seated, before and after their performances.

The pastor's quick survey told him that at least a dozen "acts" were still to be heard, so it would be some time before he could escape to the refuge of his rectory room. Sighing, he automatically applauded for the retreating violin and piano duet as the revue's perennial Mistress of Ceremonies, Tessie Winkler, erupted from her seat in the front row and lumbered up the stairs to the stage.

Tessie had been a thorn in the pastor's side ever since she had been abruptly widowed and had decided to resume what she referred to as her "career"—teaching voice and piano. However, she'd also decided to join St. Brigid's choir, and on first hearing her rendition of the *Dies Irae* as he was saying a funeral Mass, Father Crumlish was so distracted that he almost forgot to sprinkle the casket with Holy Water.

It wasn't just the woman's strident voice or her dictatorship in running things that annoyed him. Her addiction to yellow clothing and golden hair coloring had something to do with it. The unlikely sight of her reminded the priest of a 200-pound lemon.

Father leaned back in his chair, wearily closed his dark blue eyes, and dozed. But it seemed barely more than a few moments when he was jolted to his senses by the appearance of Tessie at his side.

"Father!" she exclaimed in an agitated whisper. "Something dreadful has happened."

"Don't tell me now that we'll have to cancel the revue?" Father said as he got to his feet. Despite himself, a note of wistful hope had crept into his query.

Tessie's cornsilk curls danced violently. "The last of the ticket money came in today—$178. I put it in a brown envelope right here in my purse." She waved a large yellow handbag under his nose. "It's been stolen!"

"It's probably safe and sound at home."

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"It definitely was in my purse when rehearsal started."

"Where was your purse?"

"Where I always leave it—on the desk backstage." Tessie's eyes snapped indignantly. "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if that pushy Don Pelham helped himself. I *knew* I shouldn't have appointed him stage manager."

"Don Pelham? The basketball player?" Father was astonished. "What's that lad doing managing a stage?"

"He pestered and pestered my Louise until I just *had* to give him the job." Tessie's fat fingers fanned her face. "He's after her, you know, Father. Imagine his nerve! Thinking my Louise would have time for a ruffian from the wrong side of the tracks."

"Hold on, now," Father said sharply. "Don Pelham's a fine lad, and one of the best basketball players Lake City College ever had."

Tessie snorted. "A no-account foster child."

"No crime in that," the priest retorted, aware that his Irish temper was on the rise. "And I'll remind you that everybody in St. Brigid's parish is from the wrong side of the tracks."

Tessie's perspiring face reddened. "Not my Louise. Not for long anyway." She turned away. "I'm going to call the police."

Father took a firm grip on her arm. "You'll not. If the envelope doesn't turn up, *I'll* notify the police. But first I'll look into this myself."

"But somebody here is a thief! You've got to report—"

"Get on with your rehearsal, Tessie," Father interrupted. "And not a word about this to anyone. Do you understand?"

Abruptly he turned, let himself out the rear door of the auditorium, and walked down an L-shaped length of corridor until he reached a door marked *Stage.*

In the 40-plus years since his ordination into the priesthood, Father Crumlish had endured many an encounter with every known type of crime and criminal. How could he avoid it, since he'd served most of those years in St. Brigid's parish which encompassed Lake City's dilapidated waterfront area? His people lived, worked, and died in the dismal aura of the docks, boats, grain and steel mills. But they were *his* people. And the old priest believed it was his first duty to help them stay out of trouble and to stand by their side when the Devil got the best of them.

Tonight wasn't the first time he'd put off calling the police until he had a chance to try to save some poor soul from the stigma of a criminal record. And for the sake of $178—well, he'd rather pay it out of his own pocket than see one of his Flock go to jail.

But with God's help, he thought now as he opened the stage door and

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climbed a short flight of stairs, maybe he could discover the thief, retrieve the money, and the police would never know. Pausing at the landing to get his bearings, he saw that the only illumination in the darkness of the cramped, inadequate backstage area came from a lamp on a battered desk close by the stage curtain. Seated at the paper-strewn desk was 19-year-old Don Pelham.

"You're the last lad I ever thought I'd see mixed up in this business," Father said good-humoredly as he walked over to the handsome, six-foot-four athlete.

Don flushed uncomfortably as he rose to his feet. "Me too, Father."

"I hear it's because of Louise Winkler—that you can't hold yourself from the lass's side."

If true, it was quite understandable. Louise unquestionably was the beauty of St. Brigid's. Unlike her stubby, rotund mother, 17-year-old Louise was tall, slim, and had the delicate blonde features of a holy-picture angel. There wasn't a young laddie-buck in the parish who hadn't mooned over her from the time she was a tot. But Father knew that, thanks to Tessie's overbearing and doting ways, Louise's pretty head was filled with foolish notions of Hollywood stardom and marriage to a fairy-tale Prince Charming.

"And all this time I thought it would be for you and little Mary Callahan that some day I'd be announcing the banns," the priest continued.

Pelham's flush deepened. "Forget it, Father."

The pastor gave him a keen glance. "Lover's quarrel?"

"Just busted up," the boy said, scowling.

Making a mental note to pursue the subject at a more appropriate time—Father Crumlish was an incurable romanticist who thoroughly enjoyed playing Cupid—the pastor turned his attention to the pressing business at hand.

"Tessie Winkler's lost a brown envelope, Don. Do you think it might be around here somewhere?"

"I'll look." Pelham began sorting the papers on the desk as Father peered out at the stage.

"Who's that performing now?"

"Mike Haggerty, Father. They say he's been doing that same song-and-dance imitation of Pat Rooney every year since the first revue."

It was true. Despite his 60 years, Mike Haggerty still talked about the day when he'd make it "big" in show business. Actually, with the exception of a brief engagement years ago as a member of a song-and-dance team, Mike's closest contact with the bright lights were his infrequent stints as a singing waiter. Nevertheless, St. Brigid's pastor never failed to listen to the man's fanciful tales, sober him up when necessary, and shame him into getting another job.

Now, as Mike bowed off stage,

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perspiration glistening on his florid bald head, Father applauded enthusiastically and clapped him on the shoulder.

"You're still nimble as a leprechaun, Mike."

Breathless, Haggerty beamed his thanks.

"That envelope isn't around here, Father," Don spoke up.

Mike paused in the midst of mopping his brow. "Somebody lose something?"

"It'll turn up," the priest said evasively, knowing Haggerty's insatiable curiosity and loose tongue.

Suddenly Mike shivered. "Hey, Don. Can I borrow your jacket? I got a chill."

"Help yourself." Pelham waved a hand in the direction of an old-fashioned coat rack. Hanging on it were two similar black-and-purple sports jackets worn by members of the Lake City College athletic teams. Haggerty walked over to the rack, selected one of the jackets, and was about to slip into it when a brown envelope fell to the floor. He bent down, picked it up—and at that instant Tessie Winkler barged into the scene. Her eyes widened.

"That's the ticket money!" she gasped. Bearing down on Mike, she snatched the envelope out of his hand. "Where did you get it?"

"It just fell out of Don's jacket," Haggerty volunteered before Father had a chance to speak.

Tessie whirled on Pelham. "I knew it! You stole it from my purse."

"Stole it!" Don's face went white.

"Now hold on, Tessie," the pastor protested. "Maybe that's not your envelope."

"Of course it's mine." Handing him the envelope she pointed to the words *Ticket Money* scrawled in an upper corner.

"The money's safe," Father said calmly, indicating the envelope's unbroken seal. "This hasn't been tampered with."

"Just because you didn't get the chance," Tessie cried, shaking an accusing finger at Pelham.

"*Me?* But I—" The lad seemed sorely beset, Father thought. "Why, I never touched it—"

"Then how did it get into your jacket? You stole it and you would have stolen the money too if—"

"Hold your tongue, Tessie," Father commanded. "I'll handle this."

Tessie eyed him coldly. "Very well, Father," she said with reluctance. "But if you don't notify the police and the college authorities and see to it that he's properly punished, I will."

"You'll make no accusations until I have proof," Father Crumlish said, his voice harsh with disapproval. "Now you and Mike get on with your rehearsal." He held up a warning finger. "But if either of you says one word about what's gone on here, I promise you there'll be no show tomorrow night."

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"Honest, Father," Don said anxiously as the priest seated himself at the desk, opened the envelope, and began to count the money. "I don't know how that got into my jacket."

Father finished counting the last bill before he spoke. "It's all here—$178. So little harm's been done." He glanced up and gazed expectantly at his young parishioner. But Pelham was staring into space, his face tight with anxiety.

"Father, do you know what could happen to me if that crazy woman starts shooting off her mouth?" he said in a shaky voice. "Especially around the college?" He groaned. "I could get kicked off the basketball team. Expelled, maybe."

Or much worse, if you're innocent, the pastor thought grimly. He'd known many a time when a good name had been irrevocably damaged by an unwarranted accusation.

He leaned forward. "Now tell me, lad," he said gently. "How do you suppose this money found its way into your jacket?"

Pelham considered, then shook his head. "I don't know. Somebody must have put it there."

"Somebody who must have known that Tessie had the money in her purse?"

"Everybody knew that, Father."

"Everybody?"

Pelham nodded. "Just before this rehearsal she got up on the stage, took an envelope out of her purse, and announced to the cast that there was 178 bucks in it—the last of the ticket money. We all cheered and then rehearsal started."

Hellfire! Didn't the woman have an ounce of common sense in her canary-colored head, Father wondered. How the Devil must be laughing up his pitchfork!

"Tessie claims she left her purse on the desk here," the priest said.

Pelham frowned. "I don't remember seeing any purse. But I probably wouldn't have noticed anyway. There was a lot of trouble."

"Trouble?"

"The footlights conked out. Mike Haggerty couldn't find the straw hat and cane he uses in his act and he was hollering at Mary Callahan—she's in charge of props. Tessie was chewing out both of them. And Harvey Kroll, too. She's got some crazy rules, like nobody can keep their props backstage—not enough room, she says. And the only time any performers are allowed back here is when they finish their act and bow off." He paused and gave the pastor a small grin. "Kroll's reciting something from *Hamlet*. Leave it to Harvey to bring culture to St. Brigid's, eh, Father?"

Father Crumlish declined to answer. But privately he agreed. It would be typical of young Kroll to select Shakespeare as a vehicle to display his intellectual prowess. Scrawny, bespectacled Harvey had an admirable record as an "excep-

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tional student." But he never let anyone forget it.

Sighing, Father got to his feet. As he did, something brushed against his shoe. Bending down, he saw that it was a small artificial yellow rose. Absent-mindedly, he picked it up and tucked it in his pocket.

"Get on with your work, lad," he murmured as he walked over to the stage curtain and stared out unseeingly. Reason told him that Don Pelham could be lying, that Tessie's accusations could be true. Reason also told him that any one of the people Don had mentioned could be guilty. He knew how easily many of his parishioners might be tempted to steal just a few dollars, let alone a sizeable sum like $178.

Surely the theft had not been planned, Father thought. Somebody, acting on impulse, had taken the envelope, placed it in the jacket's inside pocket, and had intended to recover it and steal the money. Only Mike Haggerty's inadvertent intervention, if it was that, had thwarted the thief's intention.

The only other possible explanation, it would seem, was that Don Pelham was lying. Unless—

"As they say on TV," Father Crumlish told himself. "It could be a 'frame'."

Don turned. "You say something, Father?"

"I was just thinking to myself," the pastor said slowly. "Could someone here be holding a grudge against you, lad?"

"Tessie Winkler sure wishes I'd drop dead," Pelham replied with a short, bitter laugh. "Louise, too. She's sore at every guy who doesn't pay her a lot of attention. And I haven't the time."

Or the money to spend on her, Father thought. "What about Haggerty?"

"He's been giving me a hard time. I'm supposed to see that everybody gets on and off stage—on schedule. Mike holds up the curtain any time he feels like it. And once he gets on stage, he wants to stay there all night."

The priest concealed a chuckle. "And young Kroll?"

Don shrugged. "Who can dig Harvey? Until a few months ago he was the coldest creep on campus. A real hermit. Then all of a sudden he comes up with this *Hamlet* bit, turns out for basketball—"

"Harvey?" Father cut in. "Playing basketball?"

Pelham shook his head. "Not playing, Father. He's our equipment manager."

The pastor was mildly astonished; many times he'd heard Kroll express contempt for "morons who go out for sports." Well, he supposed the lad could have had a change of heart.

"And what," he asked, "about Mary Callahan?"

Pelham's eyes clouded. "Like I said—we've busted up."

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"Your doing?"

"Uh—sort of—" Don said hesitantly.

Father Crumlish sighed. "Now I want you to tell me again, lad, that you didn't take that envelope from Tessie's purse."

"I didn't, honest. I'm willing to swear—"

"You needn't," Father said. "I'll take your word for it."

The priest turned away and headed for the stairs. He wanted to believe the lad; yet hadn't he with his own eyes seen the brown envelope tumble from Pelham's jacket? Or had he?

"By the way," Father asked, turning back to the boy, "who owns that other jacket hanging there?"

Don glanced toward the coat rack. "Oh, that one? That's Harvey Kroll's."

Returning to the auditorium, Father Crumlish spotted a small mirror shining in the semi-darkness and surmised, correctly, that he'd find Louise Winkler, make-up in hand, peering into it.

"There's enough of that paint on your face now to cover the rectory walls," the priest said jovially as he sank into a chair at her side.

The girl giggled. "It'll be my turn to perform pretty soon, Father." She paused for effect. "I'm playing the *Polonaise*."

The pastor made no comment. He'd heard Louise's piano rendition at a rehearsal earlier in the week and had thought to himself at the time that if Chopin had been listening, the poor fellow must have been whirling in his hallowed grave.

"I'd say everyone here is doing a fine job—including Don Pelham," Father said casually. "I hear it's because of you that he took on the job of stage manager."

Louise simpered and gave him a coy glance from her china-blue eyes. "He was so jealous, when he found out that Harvey Kroll was in the show. He *begged* Mummy to let him do something." Her gaze returned to the mirror in her hand. "Harvey's so artistic. But Don—well, he's just a basketball player."

"One of the best," Father said, annoyed at the supercilious tone of her voice. "And he came in mighty handy tonight too, when the footlights went out. Weren't you backstage when all the commotion was going on?" Father knew that wherever Tessie was, Louise usually was not far behind.

"I wasn't there, Father," Louise said with a positive shake of her head. "Mummy sent me to the prop room. And besides, she has strict rules. Performers aren't permitted backstage except when they finish their act. Then we have to hurry and get right back here to our seats." She sighed deeply. "Mummy says she could put on a really marvelous show, if only there was more room—"

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The priest got to his feet, cutting her off. He had more to do than listen to Louise's recital of Tessie's complaints about St. Brigid's lack of stage facilities. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Mike Haggerty swaggering up the aisle and he decided that it was time he had a word with the shiftless fellow.

He caught up with Haggerty in the corridor. "How's the show going, Mike?"

"Terrible, Father."

"Surely now, not as bad as all that?"

"It's that Pelham punk. Doesn't know beans about show biz and he's giving me orders. Do you know he's the reason I had to cut my act? He told Tessie that I was on stage too long. Me! The only pro in the cast. How do you like that?"

Before Father Crumlish had a chance to sooth Haggerty's obviously battered pride, Mike walked away. Moments later the priest opened the door of a small room off the corridor and found Mary Callahan sewing a bedraggled red feather on a large straw hat of indeterminate vintage. As she glanced up, Father gazed at her affectionately.

Mary always reminded him of the colleens back in his native Tralee, County Kerry. Her glossy black hair hung in soft waves, framing her rosy cheeks and deep brown eyes. But otherwise, she was a plain girl with little to offer in the way of physical charms.

"The good Lord never meant you to look so downcast, lass," Father said, giving Mary's shoulder a fond pat. "And you can take my word for it, you and your young man will be walking out together again in no time."

Eighteen-year-old Mary eyed him coldly. "If you're talking about Don Pelham, Father, I couldn't care less."

"Never you mind now," the priest continued consolingly. "I know it must be a hard blow for you to see the foolish young scalawag running after Louise—"

"Don?" Mary broke in incredulously. "After Louise?" She laughed. "It's the other way around, Father. And she's welcome to him. After the way he acted on our last date—" She paused and bent her head to her sewing.

"The way he acted? You don't mean to tell me now that he—that he got too frisky with you?" At Mary's blush of admission the priest's visage turned grim. "I'll have a word with him," he said, giving her shoulder another reassuring pat.

The priest was bewildered as he murmured a final word and departed. What was the real truth about the relationship between Don Pelham and Louise Winkler, he wondered. Then he put the matter out of his mind and went in search of Harvey Kroll.

He found him perched on a window sill in the corridor, silently

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mouthing the words typed on a script that he held in his hand. As Father approached, Kroll looked up; his pale eyes, sheltered by horn-rimmed, thick-lensed glasses, blinked inquiringly.

"It's a fine thing that you and your friend Pelham are in the show," Father Crumlish remarked after exchanging a greeting with the boy.

"Friend!" Kroll's eyes darkened with anger. "That big ape is no friend of mine, Father."

"What's he done to you?" the pastor asked, startled by the venom in the usually mild-mannered Kroll's voice.

Harvey started to reply indignantly; then he broke off and clenched his small fists. "If he doesn't stop pestering her, I'm going to break his empty head."

Ordinarily the picture of will-o'-the-wisp Harvey inflicting any physical damage on husky Don Pelham would have provoked a chuckle from the priest. But the boy's words and attitude sobered him.

"I imagine it's Louise you're talking about," he said mildly. Harvey's eyes, as he gave the pastor a brief, embarrassed glance, reminded Father Crumlish of two one-minute poached eggs. Poor lovesick lad, he thought, and was about to turn away when a sudden thought struck him.

"By the way," he said. "I understand you got a tongue lashing from Tessie this evening when she caught you backstage." His eyes twinkled. "I would have thought that a bright lad like yourself would know better than to break her rules."

Kroll flushed uncomfortably. "I—I had to get something out of my jacket."

The priest nodded. "I see."

Get something out of it, or put something into a similar jacket, Father wondered as he left Harvey and once again entered the darkened auditorium and seated himself in the last row. Suddenly he felt terribly tired. And he was almost ready to concede, reluctantly, that maybe he was getting old.

He had failed miserably so far in his attempt to discover the identity of the thief. All he'd discovered was that a few of his young parishioners were acting furtive. And yet he had the uneasy feeling that there was more to it, that something was eluding him. He thought about Mike Haggerty's loudmouth braggadocio, and Tessie's petty conniving . . .

His musing was interrupted by a crashing piano chord and the appearance on stage of the next performer—Tessie herself. There was no need for Father to wonder which of her two numbers it would be this year—*Indian Love Call* or *Roses of Picardy*. The large bouquet of artificial yellow roses clutched in her chubby hands gave him the ominous answer even before Tessie proceeded to rattle the rafters.

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"Ro-zez air shi-neeng een Pick-air-dee—"

The pastor winced. Whenever she sang this selection, Tessie embellished the second chorus by throwing roses to the audience. And since she had a powerful pitching arm and an aim as true as that of Sandy Koufax, the priest knew that tomorrow night, in his customary front-row-center seat, he'd be pelted left and right with roses, one of which was bound to catch him squarely in the eye.

Gloomily Father listened, painfully aware that before the night was over he would have to confront the woman and see what could be done about her accusations against Don Pelham. As he shifted about on the hard chair, something crackled in his coat pocket. Investigating, he drew out a somewhat battered artificial yellow rose. Now what, he wondered, did this mean? Did it have some special significance?

It was a long moment before he replaced it in his pocket.

Now, despite the gnawing ache in his bones, the human longing to remove his clerical clothes and collar, to say his prayers and crawl into bed, Father Crumlish was very alert. Straightening up in his chair, he waited patiently for the rehearsal to conclude.

Father Crumlish intercepted Tessie and Louise as they were leaving the auditorium. "It'll be a fine show," he told Tessie. "But something puzzles me. I know you have strict rules here. And, in particular, I have in mind the rule that has to do with no props allowed backstage. So I'm wondering what possessed you, of all people, to break it?"

Tessie stared at him, bewildered. "I—? I didn't!"

"You weren't backstage tonight—with your roses?"

"Why, of course not, Father. I sent Louise for them. Right after the rehearsal started. She went to the prop room and brought them back to me here in the auditorium."

"Then that explains how I happened to pick up this one from the backstage floor," Father said as he drew out the battered yellow rose from his pocket. He turned to Louise whose usually animated face was suddenly pale and still. "You must have dropped it, accidentally."

"Louise couldn't have been there, Father," Tessie said, her voice edged with exasperation. "She knows my rules—"

"More's the pity you haven't taught her more important rules," the pastor broke in sternly. Again he turned his gaze on Louise. "You lied to me when you said you weren't backstage before you gave your own performance. Now I want to know why. And I want the truth!"

Nervously Louise fussed with her hair. "I—everybody—knew about the footlights going out—and every-

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thing. So when Mummy sent me to get her roses, I—I just thought I'd stop backstage for a minute to see—" Her voice trailed away at the shocked expression on her mother's face.

"To see what further malicious mischief you could cause?" Father said harshly. "To see if, in all the confusion, you mightn't find a chance to take the envelope with the ticket money out of your mother's purse and put it into Don Pelham's jacket without being noticed?"

"Louise!" Tessie commanded. "Tell Father you did no such thing!"

"It's bad enough that you lied to me," Father said to Louise as she bit her lip and began to speak. "Now don't lie again to your mother. Your foolish vanity already has led you into lying about young Pelham. You lied when you said he was mixed up in this show because of you, and all the time you knew that it was because of his fondness for Mary Callahan. You couldn't bear that, could you? It wasn't enough that you had poor Harvey Kroll and every other likely lad mooning over you. You had to have Don Pelham too. So you decided deliberately, out of spite, to get him into trouble."

"Father Crumlish!" Tessie exploded. "Are you accusing *my* Louise—?"

"That I am," the pastor interrupted firmly, never taking his eyes from his young parishioner's distraught face. "And I'm sure that the crime took no more than a few moments. Louise knew, from the size, which jacket was Don's. What she didn't know was that, by accident, Mike Haggerty would stumble onto the envelope. Now tell me, Louise," Father said, "what did you think would come of your spitefulness? Did you imagine the police would be here, search everyone, and then find the evidence to brand Pelham as a thief? Was that how you thought you'd get even with Don for not paying any attention to you?"

"It—it was just a joke," Louise said in a small uncertain voice.

"Joke, is it!" Father thundered. "Do you know what your unholy deviltry might have led to? Do you know that the poor lad might have had to go all through his life with an unjust black mark against his record?"

As Louise crumbled and burst into tears, Tessie embraced her soothingly. "There, there, now. No real harm's been done." She turned to Father Crumlish. "There's no need to badger the poor child so."

The pastor's gaze hardened. "Don't think for a moment that you're blameless, Tessie. It's your coddling and your silly notions that made this girl imagine that false pride and malice were no sin." Tessie's face flamed, but she made no response.

Father took a deep breath. "Now

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after tomorrow night," he told Louise, "I'll expect you to report to me at the rectory every afternoon. I have a few lessons in mind that I want you to learn."

"But that's impossible," Tessie cried indignantly. "Louise has ballet on Tuesdays, drama class on Thursdays, piano, voice—"

"There'll be no more of that," Father interrupted firmly. He paused significantly. "Unless you'd rather I followed the advice you gave me earlier, Tessie. I can still call the police."

In the sudden silence Father Crumlish waited until Tessie and Louise, shamefaced, had departed. Then he locked the auditorium door and limped across the bit of lawn to the rectory. His arthritis was acting up again.

Even his lumpy mattress went unnoticed the following evening as Father Crumlish pulled the bedclothes up to his ears. St. Brigid's Spring Revue was over and done with until another year. Thank the good Lord.

True, he had some unpleasant tasks to perform tomorrow. He would have to start talking some sense into Louise Winkler's pretty but misguided head. He would have to do the same thing with Don Pelham and Mary Callahan. And maybe he could find a moment to advise Harvey Kroll to stick to his Shakespeare. And of course, as usual, it was high time Mike Haggerty found himself a bit of steady work. And then there was Tessie . . .

Suddenly a small smile creased Father's worn face. It had been apparent to him for some time now that Tessie's girth was becoming an increasing deterrent when she mounted the narrow, winding staircase leading to St. Brigid's choir loft. It was only a matter of time and calories before she would no longer be able to torture him with her rendition of the *Dies Irae* or anything else.

Just before he fell asleep, Father Crumlish decided exactly what he would do the very first thing tomorrow morning. He would recommend that the cast of this year's Spring Revue present the Mistress of Ceremonies with a token of their appreciation for all her efforts—say, a ten-pound, super deluxe box of chocolate-covered creams . . .

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Q. B. I. : QUEEN'S BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

. . . in which Ellery is once more called in on a case involving the security of the United States.

SPY DEPT.: *Dead Ringer*

by ELLERY QUEEN

THE HUSH-HUSH MAN'S NAME was Storke, and Ellery had once before worked with him on a case involving the security of the United States. So when Storke showed up out of nowhere and said, "Scene of the crime first, the run-down later," Ellery dropped what he was doing and reached for his hat without a question.

Storke drove him downtown, chatting pleasantly, parked on one of the meandering side streets below Park Row in a space that was magically unoccupied, and strolled Ellery over to a thin shop-front with a dusty window bearing the crabbed legend: *M. Merrilees Monk, Tobacconist, Est. 1897.*

Two young men who looked like Wall Street clerks on their dinner hour lounged outside, puffing on pipes. There was no sign of a police uniform.

"This must be a big one," murmured Ellery; and he preceded Storke into the shop.

It was as aged-looking inside as out, narrow and poorly lighted, with walls of some musty dark wood, Victorian fixtures, and a gas-jet for lighting cigarettes and cigars. Everything was pungent with tobacco.

In the deeps of the little shop, near the curtained doorway to a rear room, stood a venerable wooden Indian, his original splendor bedraggled to a sprinkle of color here and there; most of him was naked pitted wood.

The Indian appeared forlorn, whereas the dead man who lay jammed between the counter and the shelves looked outraged, for he had suffered cruelly at the hands not of time but of an assassin. His head and face resembled a jellied mash.

Curiously, his dead arms embraced a large squarish canister apparently used for the storage of pipe tobacco, for it was labeled MIX C and obviously came from a row of similar canisters on one of the upper shelves behind the cluttered counter.

"He was attacked from behind at this point," Ellery said to Storke,

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indicating a stiffening puddle at the feet of the wooden Indian, "probably as he was going into the back room for something. The killer must have left him for dead; but he wasn't dead, because this blood trail goes from the Indian all the way around and behind the counter to where he's lying now.

"The picture is unmistakable: When the killer left, this man somehow—don't ask me how!—managed to drag himself to that particular spot, and in spite of his frightful injuries reached up to that tobacco can and took it down from that empty space on the shelf before he died."

"That's the way I read it, too," said Storke.

"May I handle the canister?"

"Everything's been processed."

Ellery took the canister from the dead man, who seemed disposed to resist, and pried off the lid. The canister was empty. He borrowed a powerful magnifier from the hush-hush man. After a moment he put the lens down.

"This canister never contained tobacco, Storke. Not a shred or speck is visible under the glass, even at the seams."

Storke said nothing; and Ellery turned to the shelves. Nine canisters remained on the shelf from which the dead man had taken the MIX C can. They were labeled MONK'S SPECIAL, BARTLEBY MIXTURE, SUPERBA BLEND, MIX A, MIX B, (and here was the space where the MIX C can must have stood), KENTUCKY LONG CUT, VIRGINIA CRIMP, LORD CAVENDISH, and MANHATTAN MIX.

"Those nine are *not* empty," said Storke, reading Ellery's mind. "Each contains what it's labeled."

Ellery squatted by the corpse. It was enveloped in a knee-length tobacconist's gown in the British fashion—a rather surprisingly muscular body of a man in his early 40s with what must once have been a sandy-fringed bald pate and sharp Anglican features.

"This, I take it, was M. Merrilees Monk," Ellery said. "Or his lineal descendant."

"Wrong on both counts," Storke replied bitterly. "He was one of our topflight operatives, and don't mention him in the same breath with Monk. As far as we know, Monk's grandfather and father were respectable tobacconists, but the incumbent is a turncoat who ran this shop as a drop for foreign agents to pick up and pass along messages, stolen material, and so on.

"We got onto Monk only recently. We put the shop under round-the-clock surveillance, but we weren't able to spot any known enemy agent entering or leaving.

"Then we got what we thought was a break. One of our Seattle men, Hartman, turned out to be a dead ringer for this Monk rat. So we brought Hartman on from the Coast, put him through an intensive training course on Monk, then took Monk into custody in the middle of

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one night, substituted Hartman, and called off our outside men to leave Hartman a clear field in the shop. He knew the risk he was running."

"And it caught up with him. Dead ringer is right." Ellery brooded over the battered U.S. agent's remains. "How long had he been playing the part of Monk?"

"Fifteen days. And no one turned up, Hartman was positive. He spent his spare time in the stockroom out back, microfilming the shop's ledger, which lists the names of hundreds of Monk's customers, each with an account number and address. Good thing he did, too, because the killer's made off with the ledger.

"Just this morning," Storke went on somberly, "Hartman phoned in that he'd found out two of the listed customers were foreign agents —exactly how we'll probably never know, because he didn't get a chance to explain. A customer walked in at that moment and he had to hang up. By the time we felt it safe to make contact with him tonight, he'd been murdered. One or both of the agents must have paid a visit to the shop as Hartman was closing up and spotted him as a ringer."

"They probably had a signal Hartman missed." Ellery stared at the empty tobacco canister. "Storke, why have you called me in on this?"

"You're looking at the reason."

"The MIX C can? It was almost certainly Monk's repository for whatever was delivered to him to be passed along. But if it contained any spy material at the time Hartman was assaulted, Storke, his killer or killers took it and blew."

"Exactly," said the hush-hush man. "That means Hartman made that superhuman effort in order to take down an *empty* can. Why was his last act to call our attention to the can?"

"Obviously he was trying to tell you something."

"Of course," said Storke impatiently. "But what? That's what we can't figure out, Ellery, and that's why I called you in. Any notions?"

"Yes," said Ellery. "He was telling you who the foreign agents are."

Storke was not given to displays of emotion, but on this occasion astonishment slackened his solid jaw and widened his shrewd eyes.

"Well, he hasn't told me a damned thing," the hush-hush man growled. "Now I suppose you'll say he's told you?"

"Well," said Ellery, "yes."

"Told you *what*?"

"Who the two foreign agents are."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

How did Ellery know the identity of the two foreign agents?

Ellery explained to Storke: "Two of the facts you gave me were: first, that the foreign agents are listed in Monk's customer ledger; second,

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that each customer's name in the ledger is assigned an account number.

"Hartman made his extraordinary dying effort to call your attention to the otherwise empty can labeled MIX C. MIX C — two word-elements. And there are two agents. This could be a coincidence, but it could also mean that each of the word-elements identifies one of the agents.

"Pursuing this theory, I noticed something unusual about the letters composing the words MIX C that is not true about any of the phrases on the nine other labels on the shelf: *every letter in* MIX C *is also a Roman numeral.*

"You take MIX. M equals 1000; IX equals 10 minus 1, or 9. MIX therefore becomes the Roman numerology for 1009. I'm sure you will find, Storke, that the customer's name listed in the ledger microfilms opposite Number 1009 is that of one of the two foreign agents.

"C is simply the Roman numeral for 100, and I think you'll find Number 100 in the ledger is the name of the other agent."

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L. J. Beeston is one of the British masters of the short "thriller." Why he is not more widely appreciated and acclaimed, or even better known, is a complete mystery to us. Here is another of Mr. Beeston's extremely readable, O. Henryesque yarns . . .

THE RETURN OF BACKSHAW

by L. J. BEESTON

IN THE WET MURK, IN ONE CORNER of the seat, a woman was droning tipsily:

If I had a thousand a year, Gaffer Gray,
If I had a thousand a year——

There passed by a stout gentleman with a light overcoat just showing his dress suit underneath. He went by slowly, staring hard.

"'Evening, 'Orace," said the woman.

He came back. His kindly eyes, as they glimmered behind his gold spectacles, were fixed, not on the shattered derelict who accosted him, but at the hunched figure of a man in the other corner of the bench on the river embankment—the man whose frock coat was green with years, like lichen on an old wall, and whose boots were a grim joke.

"Backshaw, my dear fellow? Can it be you?" said the stroller in a shocked tone.

The other stirred restlessly, and shot an uneasy glance. He shook his head, and muttered something unintelligible.

The stout gentleman in the dress suit hesitated, then stooped and looked keenly into the white face with its red eyes, and the grossly disheveled hair.

"God bless me! It *is* Jimmy Backshaw!" he ejaculated.

The woman, careless of this drama, took up her drawl:

What fun we would have, what sights we would see,
If I had a thousand a year, Gaffer Gray,
If I had a thousand a year——

"Come, come, Jimmy," implored the stout gentleman affectionately, "you are not ashamed to recognize an old friend? I'm Conway—Sidney Conway. You haven't forgotten me? You must remember me!"

The other lifted again his bleared, heavy eyes. He shook his head a second time, but with reluctance, and into his unshaved face crept an expression of cunning.

"Now you come along with me," urged the stout man gently, laying a gloved hand on the thin shoulder. "Thank heaven I ran up against you. I won't take a denial. My poor

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fellow, you have had a bad fall in this rough and tumble world. Forgive my alluding to it. Now you are coming home with me to a bite of supper, even if I have to carry you. You hear, Jimmy?"

The other rose stiffly, his muscles numbed with the rain and chill wind blowing off the river, and he trembled throughout his spare body. Even his teeth rattled together. The cunning did not pass from his eyes as he tried to meet the gaze bent upon him.

"What did you say my name is?" he growled shiftily.

"Jimmy Backshaw, you old donkey. You are not afraid of me? Don't I look happy to meet you? Is this an occasion for a show of pride on your side? Are you going to insist that the name of Sidney Conway is unknown to you?"

"No!" blurted the other, with sudden, fierce vehemence. "I knew you directly you looked at me. And I'll go with you for that bite of supper and a glass of something hot. Heavens, do I look as if I could refuse?"

"That's better, Jimmy," answered Sidney Conway, his kindly eyes blinking behind his spectacles. "I'm still a bachelor. And who do you think I've got at my place tonight? Algy Wedgwood! You are not going to tell me that you've forgotten *him?*"

"Wedgwood?" echoed the other, with a sideways, very uneasy glance. "Of course I remember him. But suppose he doesn't remember me?"

"We will see! Come along. My rooms are quite close."

He took his shivering companion by the arm, turned his back on the river, and entered a labyrinth of streets which were deserted at that late hour.

At the end of ten minutes' walk he pulled up before a door in a narrow alley. On one side of this very grimy court was a high brick wall. On the other rose the side of a lofty block of buildings which were self-contained flats, having an iron stairway running zigzag from its topmost floor.

He pushed ajar the door in the alley, crossed a sodden piece of ground, which was dubiously adorned by sanitary dustbins, and fitted a key to the lock of another door close to the foot of the fire-escape stairway.

"I rent the bottom flat here," he explained, "and have the privilege of this side entrance."

They were in a small passage where a single low-power electric bulb glowed. At the end of it Conway flung open a door.

"Nous sommes arrivés," he cried cheerily. "Come right in, and welcome."

At that moment a man who was lounging in the padded depth of an armchair rose from his comfortable receptacle with a startled cry.

"What the devil have you got there, old man?"

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"Easy, easy, Algy," laughed Conway, almost dragging his reluctant visitor into the sociable warmth and light of the cosy room. "Try a more personal pronoun, as being more respectful to our guest."

"*Guest?*" echoed the other, with a look of open disgust. "What joke —"

"It is anything but a jest. I found him on a seat by the river, poor chap. Come, Algy, you don't want me to introduce an old pal, do you?"

With the words he pushed a second armchair toward the visitor, who sank into it, his eyes blinking painfully in the glare of the light.

"An old pal," Wedgwood echoed, his brows puckered in perplexity. He placed on the table a book which he had been reading, then stepped up to the figure which was thawing its frozen fingers by the fireglow. A silence of a minute ensued. Conway, his face radiant, lighted a cigarette.

"Well?" said he, tossing aside the match.

"The—er—gentleman has the advantage of me," drawled Wedgwood.

"Not so," said Conway, crisply. "Look again. You know him perfectly well."

Wedgwood stared again.

"I'm hanged if I do," he dissented petulantly.

The figure in the chair raised himself painfully. He growled, "I'm going. What did I tell you?"

"Stop!" interposed Conway. He wheeled sharply on Wedgwood, with the demand, "Perhaps the voice will assist your crass dullness?"

Wedgwood put his fingers to his chin, and his lips parted with an expression of astonishment and mental pain. He stammered, "It is not—not—"

"Out with it, man!" cried Conway.

"Not *Backshaw?*" he gasped, incredulously.

Conway shouted and clapped his hands.

"No other, I'll swear," he beamed.

"My soul!" said Wedgwood, unable to remove his fascinated gaze from the figure hunched in the cushioned chair.

"A find, you'll admit," went on Conway. "He denies his identity. I don't wonder; but we are going to knock that silly pride out of him, eh, Algy? Whines like an underdog; but we'll make him bark like the thoroughbred he is. D'ye blame me for bringing him along?"

"I should say not!" cried Wedgwood. He clapped the shivering guest on the shoulder.

"There's no other man in the wide-wide that I'd sooner see than you, Jimmy Backshaw," he declared with quivering voice.

The man addressed lifted his eyes. A cunning light had again passed into them. He rubbed his palms, glanced shiftily round the well furnished room, and that artful

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glimmer deepened as he meditated.

"All right. I believe you," he answered thickly, and he shrugged imperceptibly.

In the meantime Conway was setting a cold supper on the table.

"My servant has leave for tonight," he explained. "At such times I generally eat at a restaurant. But we shall do very well in the circs, and we can chat at our ease in my rooms."

"Very true," Wedgwood assented. "And we won't make our friend open his lips for half an hour, save to put away good food."

He placed a seat for the guest, who accepted it. His red eyes followed with intense suspicion and uneasiness the movements of his hosts, and threw ravenous glances at the cold fowl and chunk of Stilton and bottle of wine. Conway was heating water over a spirit lamp, and he mixed a little brandy with it.

"Drink this first, Jimmy," he counseled. "It will stop that shivering."

The next minute they warmly engaged the supper. After a few mouthfuls the guest showed signs of weariness. Soon his fork clattered to the floor, his head drooped, his limbs relaxed, and he fell into a profound slumber.

Conway rose cautiously, and peered into the white face.

"He's off," he grunted. "And serve him jolly well right for saying he was Jimmy Backshaw—that wholly imaginary person!"

"Pardon; you *said* he was," laughed Wedgwood.

"Same thing. He agreed with me—the liar!"

"He won't wake for a couple of hours at least," said Wedgwood. "You didn't put too much sleeping dope in the brandy?"

"I don't think I did. So far, good. Now to business."

He switched off the light and jerked the blind from the window. If the unconscious guest had opened his eyes he would doubtless have been astonished to perceive the river embankment facing the block of flats, and the bench which he had occupied in view.

"Coast clear?" called Wedgwood in the darkness.

"Not a soul astir," answered Conway. He pulled up the lower window, and peered to right and left. "Nobody near the house—as yet. The place will be watched, but we have a start. Get busy."

He readjusted the blind and flicked on the light. In the palm of his hand Wedgwood was holding a truly lustrous diamond of considerable size. It was a glorious sapphire-blue in color.

"You splendid creature, you," he mused, holding it to the light and peering into its velvet depths. "There are ten thousand pounds here, Conway, or I'm a minister of the Gospel."

Conway was doing a curious

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thing. With a small pair of sharp scissors he was ripping a hole in the bottom left-hand corner of the faded frock coat worn by their sleeping guest.

"I suggest this," he ventured. "As good as anywhere. There's plenty of padding in the corner which will make an admirable receptacle. Any objections?"

"None whatever. Here you are," answered Wedgwood.

Conway slipped in the stone, and with needle and thread repaired the slight damage neatly.

"Sharp's the word," he said briskly. "I don't fear he'll wake; but attention is bound to be focused on you, as I explained, and we have got to get the diamond safely away before the spotlight is turned on. Open the doors first. Luckily, the poor devil doesn't weigh much more than a hundred pounds."

Wedgwood hurried out and speedily returned. They placed their hands under the man's arms and lifted him to an upright posture. His head sagged over sideways with a rather sickening jerk. Only by main strength could they keep him upright. His teeth were clenched horribly tight; merely the whites of his eyes showed, and he breathed as one struck down by an apoplectic fit.

"He's dying!" whispered Wedgwood, appalled. "You didn't consider his weakness when you dosed him."

"Rot! He'll pull out," replied Conway, with an anxious look into the sightless eyeballs. "Run him along, and don't lose your head if we are stopped."

They half dragged, half lifted their senseless burden through the short passage into the open, then through a doorway at the other end of the alley, which opened, in that direction, on the front of the building. They traversed a short gravel path, then the public pavement, then the silent and deserted road, while they held the man between them in a fairly natural posture.

But no eye saw them as they reached the bench on the riverfront. The bench had no occupant. They planted their burden in a corner and so left him. The rain had not ceased. A mist beat up from the stones; a ship's siren howled over the distorted surface of the water.

"I don't like it," admitted Wedgwood. "If the poor devil pegs out —"

"Bah! That sort never pegs out," scorned Conway.

In the sitting room ten minutes later Wedgwood, a newly lighted cigar between his lips, observed, "We have adopted a drastic policy. A desperate move, if you ask me."

"It had to be," smiled Conway, standing on the rug before the fire. "Yours the fault, if fault there was. Concerning your acquisition of Mrs. Goodsack's famous and wonderful blue diamond, I have nothing but praise, nothing but praise."

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He waved his hand gently up and down. "But in coming to me with it three hours after, you acted —to be blunt—like a born fool. You, my dear Wedgwood, are not suspect; indeed, this is your first essay in the delicate art of jewel lifting, but I am just in the shadow.

"True, the only thing against me is that I was present at so many houses when losses were sustained; but I have felt in my bones of late that I am being talked about in an uncomfortable way. That being so, the presence in this flat of a famous stone of fabulous worth spells Danger—with a large and flame-painted capital D.

"Just now I am going easy—easy and ever so cautiously—waiting for the shadow to edge off me. And then, all at once, when I had resolved not to look at a diamond for six months, up turns my friend Wedgwood with a catch that would be the envy of the king of crooks. Very nice, and—very nasty."

"By Jove, Conway, it was opportunity that let me down, that made me a thief," said the other, fiercely troubled. "You know the state of my finances, that it is absolutely rotten. I was one of the earliest guests at Mrs. Goodsack's ball tonight—yesterday evening, I should say, for it's cursed late now. She was wearing the diamond pendant. I had no more idea of stealing it than of stealing you. An hour or two later a clumsy partner caused the thin gold chain to break, and the jewel fell to the floor.

"Mrs. Goodsack at once removed it—to her room. Well, I was feeling slack and seedy, and I left soon after. As I was leaving the house I noticed that one side of it was in repair, covered with builders' scaffolding. And then it struck me that that meant a fairly easy access to Mrs. Goodsack's room.

"It was raining cats and dogs, and the night black as the pit. Temptation caught me by the throat. I leaped a wall and swarmed up the scaffolding, forced the window catch, and got through. I broke open two drawers in an escritoire, found the jewel box, and lifted the diamond.

"Everything worked easy as pie; but when I found myself at home I got the shivers. I was more scared then than at any other time. I began to want to see you, badly. Didn't I know it was a matter you could handle better than I? Wasn't I in the secret of your—er—profession? Hadn't you often tempted me to help you when you knew I was down at heel? So I came to you, Conway."

"Wait. How long was that after your actual scoop?"

"Three hours, roughly."

"Too much if the loss was discovered at once."

"I hope not. I hope not, Conway. As I was the first guest to leave they might have followed me—"

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"Unlikely. What did you do with the gold setting of the pendant?"

"Flung it into the river. Look here, if you are so infernally nervy of having the stone about you, why didn't you advise me to keep it?"

"You?" mocked Conway, throwing back his head in a silent laugh. "Your newly hurt conscience would have made you restore it in the morning. I cursed you for bringing it, but it was far too good a haul to let go. The police will search my rooms surreptitiously at least once. That will be because Algy Wedgwood, after leaving Mrs. Goodsack's ball early, paid me a late visit."

"But how can they find that out?"

"How? They will, sure as eggs. Trust Treadway of the Yard to get on that scent. I know him! Therefore, it was most important that I slip the diamond to a third person without delay. That I chose a dramatic method, you will allow."

"I should have thought it easy to find a dozen, safe hiding places."

"Easy? Easy to hide a ten thousand pounds diamond? Good Lord, you don't know what you're talking about."

"But we shall have to keep a watchful eye on this vagrant?"

"We? You will, you mean. So far as I'm concerned, the diamond does not exist—not for six months. I don't want even to think of it if I can help it, for fear of wiring a mental telegraphic message to New Scotland Yard. But it is you who must ever keep our man under observation; and you must begin in a very few hours. If you ever lose sight of him I shall probably kill you."

"Suppose he pawns his coat?"

"Then you get the ticket."

"Easy said," grumbled Wedgwood. "Was it really necessary to pitch him that yarn about his being a wholly imaginary Jimmy Backshaw?"

"My dear fellow," beamed Conway. "In that matter it was your fortunate privilege to observe one of my most subtle touches. If I had gone out and fetched him here without that make-believe story, had drugged him and taken him back, what would have been his impression later on? That he had been victimized to some doubtful end, obviously. I do not want him to think any such thing; one could not tell where it would stop, just what he would do.

"As things are now, he will awake with a hazy idea in his poor fuddled brain of having been hailed as a dear old pal by a swell in evening dress, who took him home to supper in an expensive flat—only to find himself, when consciousness returned, in the same corner of the same bench he had occupied when the mysterious aforesaid swell took him to his bosom. Now, I put it to you—what will be his final conclusion?"

Wedgwood grinned. "He will

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think that he dreamed it," he replied.

"*Ex*-actly. You admit the subtlety of the move? Give me a good cigar. The room needs fumigating after our visitor. By George, he must have been saturated. See where the water has run from his clothes—"

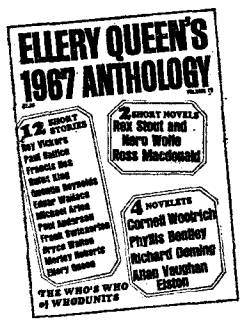
"That is an error," said a quiet voice. "The moisture is a small quantity of brandy—drugged."

Wedgwood spun round, his face livid. Conway, the cigar an inch from his parted lips, had become paralyzed.

In the open doorway stood their late guest.

He rubbed his palms in a gentle motion, and his expression suggested a full-fed panther's contentment.

"Was I watching this flat when you first came along? Even so. And now? Now I have the entire story from its very beginning. That is highly gratifying to me, gentlemen," purred Inspector Treadway of New Scotland Yard.



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Do you remember James Powell's first story, "The Friends of Hector Jouvet," in the April 1966 issue of EQMM? Anthony Boucher wrote us that he thought it was the best "first story" to appear in EQMM in three years.

Now we give you James Powell's second story—and it's a doozy!

"The Stollmeyer Sonnets" introduces Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (shades of TV's Bullwinkle!). The story is a spoof on many levels. It concerns an international crisis in which three small European nations come eyeball to eyeball to eyeball. It also exposes a philatelic situation which, to the best of our recollection, has never been used as the theme of a story (and is therefore long overdue). If you are a stamp collector, you will find this chuckling tale especially delicious; if you are not a philatelist, you will find it, we promise, equally delightful. From first word to last the story is charming and funny (at times hilarious) and lightheartedly penetrating. In fact, it is the spoof to end spoofs—we wonder if it can ever be outspoofed!

THE STOLLMEYER SONNETS

by JAMES POWELL

THERE HAD BEEN SKIRMISHING between Tasmite and Amalek tribesmen that week-end. Otherwise, world attention would certainly have been focused on the tiny republic of San Marino where the foreign ministers of the Little Three—San Marino, Monaco, and Liechtenstein—were about to sit down to an historic meeting.

But there was one man quite content to have the eyes of the world turned elsewhere. Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was traveling incognito. At each turn of the road as his bus wound up and around the base of the crag on which the city of San Marino stood, he repeated to himself, "I am Bob Jones, a Hudson Bay blanket salesman."

Two other voices spoke inside his head. One called him Maynard: "You'll do just great, Maynard." That was his wife, good old Mavis. The other belonged to Inspector McNaughton: "For gossake, try not to boot this one, Bullock."

The bus stopped in the lower part of town. Bullock savored his disguise as he waited for his bags

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amid the humble, foreign-looking passengers. "If only they knew," he thought, stroking his trim mustache with a thumbnail.

"Acting Sergeant Bullock?" A sandy-haired man with glasses stood at Bullock's elbow.

The Mountie looked him up and down. "That depends," he said.

"I'm Wickett, the Canadian cultural and military attaché," said the man. "We expected you yesterday."

"This isn't the easiest place in the world to get to, you know," said Bullock gruffly.

"All I meant was, we've been looking forward to having a real Mountie here," said Wickett, who insisted on carrying Bullock's bags to the car. "I guess you do a lot of this kind of work," he added.

"As a matter of fact, for the last couple of years I've been guarding the flowerbeds in front of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa," said Bullock. "It's exciting work in its own way. You never hear the bee that has your name on it."

"How did you happen to get picked for this assignment, then?" asked Wickett.

Bullock smiled sadly. "Last week was the Mounties' Annual Picnic," he said. "By a strange quirk of fate I came in last in the sack race. They had already started in on the lobster salad by the time I crossed the finish line and the ground was scarlet with tunics. The entire Headquarters Barrack was down with food poisoning, present company excepted."

Bullock eyed Wickett's tiny white Fiat suspiciously before squeezing himself into the front seat. "Well now," he said, "put me in the picture. What kind of a mess have you fellows gotten yourselves into this time?"

"I'm not sure how to begin," said Wickett, starting the car up the steep ascent into the city.

"Just put it in your own words," said Bullock.

"Well," said Wickett, "how are you on geopolitics?"

Bullock reflected for a minute. "I haven't really gone into it since grade school."

"All it boils down to is that any country worth its salt has a sphere of influence," said Wickett. "Traditionally, Liechtenstein has been in the Canadian sphere. You might say that Canada is like Liechtenstein's kindly big brother. San Marino and Monaco, the other members of the Little Three, are in the spheres of influence of Albania and Yugoslavia respectively. So far so good?"

"Check," said Bullock.

"The national economies of the Little Three," continued Wickett, "are based on postage stamps. But your stamp collector is a real fanatic. Left to his own devices he'd soon impoverish himself and his family to satisfy his unnatural craving. So the Little Three agreed, under the terms of the Monte Carlo Con-

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vention of 1947, to restrict the number of stamps and new issues they printed each year. You might say," said Wickett, turning to Bullock with a sly chuckle, "that they were content to milk the goose that lays the golden egg."

"Check," said Bullock grimly.

"Then about a year ago," said Wickett, "the lid blew off the Monte Carlo Convention and we found ourselves with a real knock-down-drag-'em-out stamp war on our hands with printing presses on all three sides going full blast."

"Wait," whispered Bullock, putting a finger to his lips. "We're being followed. Some guy in a leather overcoat on one of those scooters."

"A Vespa with diplomatic license plates?" said Wickett. "A big fellow with a black handlebar-type mustache?"

"Check," said Bullock.

"I'm afraid that's Major Glinka of the Iron Hats, as the Albanians call their Secret Police."

"Who let the cat out of the bag?" said Bullock. "Only you and the Ambassador knew I was coming."

"I know you'll understand," said Wickett hopefully. "It bothers Mrs. Wickett that the other Embassies are always having some big high muckity-muck or other visit San Marino. So when I told her you were coming she called the newspapers. You made the social notes."

"I can understand her excitement," said Bullock. "But, good godfrey, Wickett—"

"Hear me out," said Wickett, "and I'll bet you'll want to keep an eye on Glinka. And if he's following you around, what could be easier?" Bullock grumbled but waved him on.

"Well, the stamp war was escalating," said Wickett. "New issues nearly every week, and in all denominations. The small collectors were going under. And how much longer could the big ones keep on buying? In panic, Monaco came up with the ultimate weapon: the megafranc stamp. They printed hundreds of thousands of stamps—millions—of this astronomical denomination. Unless the insane stamp war stopped, Monaco threatened to dump its megafranc stockpile on the market.

"Overnight, Liechtenstein and San Marino had megafranc stockpiles of their own. The Little Three were eyeball to eyeball to eyeball. A hasty move could bring on a philatelic Armageddon that could destroy them all and stamp collecting as we know it today.

"Meanwhile, clear heads in Ottawa came up with a really ingenious plan of inspections and controls to guarantee the Monte Carlo Convention and to supervise the trilateral destruction of megafranc stockpiles. The Ottawa Plan for Postal Peace. Liechtenstein, of course, was all for it. But the Yugoslavs got Monaco to counter with the Belgrade Plan, identical to ours except in name. And the Albanians

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sold San Marino some rubbish about the historical inevitability of San Marino's surviving the holocaust and picking up the pieces.

"Fortunately for us, however, Yugoslav-Albanian relations have recently soured. Border incidents. The Yugoslavs claim when their sheep wander over the border the Albanians send them back sheared. Just to spite the Albanians, it looked like they might be ready to vote for the Ottawa Plan."

Wickett turned to Bullock. "Now you're going to ask me, 'All right, Wickett, where the heck do I come in?' "

Bullock considered that for a minute. "All right," he said.

"Three days ago Baron Stollmeyer of Liechtenstein had a manuscript stolen from his castle," said Wickett. "A sonnet cycle written by the Baron when he was a young man. I gather it's pretty racy stuff, all about the youthful indiscretions of some of his country's leading citizens. We believe the Albanians stole the manuscript and will use the threat of publication to force Liechtenstein to vote against the Ottawa Plan. Your job is to recover the manuscript."

"If it's in the Albanian Embassy that shouldn't be too difficult," said Bullock. "I once gained entry into a counterfeiters' den just by walking through the door and shouting a hearty 'Meter man!' " He saw no reason to mention they had locked the cellar door after him and escaped, printing presses and all. "Another trick I sometimes use is to put in a false fire-alarm and then follow the firemen carrying a nozzle or something."

"I thought you'd like to begin your investigation with Baron Stollmeyer," said Wickett. "So I asked him to meet us at our Embassy in an hour. That will give you a chance to freshen up at the hotel. It's back to the Embassy for me. Somebody has to answer the phone. There's only the Ambassador and myself, but with the grousing season here, I don't see much of him."

"Check," said Bullock, who had turned to see if Major Glinka was still behind them.

"By the way," said Wickett, "I've heard that Glinka is a pretty ugly customer. A master of Montenegran savate. His heels are hard calluses. He can kill a man with his bare feet. If he starts taking his shoe off, watch out."

"If he tries anything with me," said Bullock, "I'll fix his wagon with a little taste of the old Marquis of Queensbury."

Flattening himself against the wall, Bullock peeked out the window of his hotel room. Glinka was still there, waiting across the street. "The hunter has become the hunted," thought Bullock and shook his head. Then he unpacked, hanging his uniform tenderly in the large clothes closet. He fingered

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one bright but stripeless sleeve. Still Acting Sergeant. How long had it been? "You'll show them, Maynard," Mrs. Bullock had said confidently.

During washup, as he scrubbed the back of his neck, Bullock thought, "Geopolitics, eh? Well, a man needs a specialty. 'This one involves a lot of tricky geopolitics,' Inspector McNaughton would say, scanning the ranks. 'Another case right up your alley, Bullock.' And someone would murmur, 'Lucky dog!' " Bullock smiled as he combed his mustache.

Bullock set out to follow Wickett's directions to the Embassy. Half an hour later he was lost in a maze of narrow streets, while behind him Glinka muttered in audible Albanian. Stopping a passer-by, an old gentleman with cane and gloves, Bullock sang a stanza of *O Canada* and with his hands imitated a flag fluttering over an Embassy door.

"Bravo. Bravo," said the old gentleman, visibly moved. He shook Bullock's hand, then walked on.

Glinka cleared his throat loudly. Bullock turned. The Albanian was pretending to look in a store window. His hands were clasped behind his back. One of them wagged and pointed up a street to Bullock's right. Ten minutes later, with Glinka prompting him from behind all the way, Bullock stood in front of the Canadian Embassy, which was above a radio and appliance store.

With the introductions out of the way, Bullock, Wickett, and Baron Stollmeyer, a balding little man with a monocle, sat around Wickett's desk in the outer office of the Embassy.

"Mr. Wickett and I have been having a jolly time getting out the Embassy mail," said the Baron. "I licked the envelopes and he licked the stamps. Quite appropriate, now that I think of it, because that's the way our present crisis began. About a year ago Monaco came out with flavored stickums on their stamps—mint, cinnamon, and anise. The collectors went wild. My own dear Liechtenstein countered with a Swiss chocolate flavor that was not unpleasant, while San Marino experimented unsuccessfully with a variety of flavors. What is it this month, Mr. Wickett?"

"*Costolletta Milanese*," said Wickett, making a face.

"Breaded veal cutlet," said the Baron. "Well, San Marino finally declared Monaco's flavored stickum had abrogated the Monte Carlo Convention. In retaliation they launched a stamp series commemorating Dante's *Divine Comedy*, stanza by stanza. They were halfway through 'The Inferno' before Liechtenstein countered with our 'Flora and Fauna of Canada' series and Monaco began issuing its 'Great Moments in the Lives of the Grimaldis' commemoratives.

"Since then, issues have been proliferating all over the place.

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Today, as the stamp collectors of the world beg for mercy, the mega-franc threat looms large on the horizon. Your being here is our only ray of hope, Acting Sergeant."

"I'll bet it is," said Bullock.

"For me, personally, this is also an occasion," said the Baron. "As a young boy I was torn between running away to join the Foreign Legion to fight the Arabs and joining the Royal Canadian Mounties to fight the lumberjacks. Of course, that was before I wanted to be a poet, the source of our present difficulty."

"So Wickett tells me," said Bullock.

"The poems in question are juvenilia," said the Baron. "But not, I like to think, without merit. As a patriot, however, I must forego the satisfaction of seeing them in print. My sonnets, you see, are thinly disguised accounts of the early, amorous exploits of some of our leading citizens. Octagon, for example, the shepherd who spies on the goddess at her bath, is our present Minister of Justice, while the nymph Florabella, who runs through the poems in various stages of dishabille, is the wife of the Prime Minister. So you see, if the Albanians have my sonnets, we are in their power."

"Why don't you take it from here, Bullock?" said Wickett.

Bullock furrowed his brow for a moment. Then he said, "What do you say we reconstruct the crime?"

When the Baron beamed approval, Bullock continued, "First off, where were the sonnets kept?"

"In my bedroom," said the Baron. "In a locked wall cabinet, the only key to which I wear on a chain around my neck."

"A chain, you say," said Bullock thoughtfully. "Tell me, Baron, how far is it from your bed to the cabinet?"

"Twenty-five feet or so," said the Baron.

"And how long is the chain?" said Bullock.

The Baron smiled with regret. "A foot and a half at most."

Bullock's brow furrowed again. "All right," he said, "let's take another tack. Suppose deft fingers—"

"I'm afraid I'm a very light sleeper," said the Baron.

"Besides," said Wickett, "that doesn't explain the oil can on the Baron's night table."

"An oil can of Albanian manufacture," said the Baron. "Such as bicycle racers use. There seems no doubt it was Rudy's. Rudy Belasco."

"Perhaps you'd better begin at the beginning," said Bullock.

"That would be about a month ago," said the Baron, "during the *Tour de Liechtenstein*, our annual eight-day bicycle race. I was out hiking in the mountains above my castle. Below me I noticed a bright speck approaching up the path. A young man on a bicycle. He bore the national colors of Albania on

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his racing silks, and as I was later to discover, the number 38 on his back. Head down, he was pumping slowly and laboriously up the path.

"When he came abreast of me I stood to one side and as is customary I applauded. Then I walked alongside him for a few minutes and finally asked, as discreetly as I could, if he hadn't taken the wrong turn somewhere.

"Well, he looked back down the empty path and then up at the high snow of the mountain peak. Suddenly all the heart went out of him. He threw down his bicycle, jumped up and down on the spokes, and hurled the wreckage on the mountainside. Then he threw himself on the ground and sobbed his heart out.

"I sat down on a rock and smoked a small cigar. After a bit he sat up and cursed the coach of the Albanian team who, in place of giving them maps, had instructed his racers to follow the other cyclists. As Rudy Belasco remarked—for that was the young man's name—'You don't win bicycle races that way.'

"Well, he seemed so personable a young man that I invited him to stay at the castle until he had recuperated from his ordeal and repaired the bicycle. So Rudy in his shorts and bright jersey became a familiar sight at my table. In fact, he and my daughter Regina grew so close I was prepared to welcome him into the family permanently. But the morning I discovered the sonnets missing, Rudy Belasco had also disappeared, bicycle and all."

"And later that day," added Wickett, "passing the Albanian Embassy here, I saw Belasco going in with Glinka and Josef Susman, the Albanian Ambassador. Of course, I didn't know it was Belasco until I received a call from our people in Liechtenstein."

"You're certain it *was* Belasco?" said Bullock.

"I identified him from the number 38 on his back," said Wickett. "I'm afraid there's no question the Albanians have the sonnets, even though, for their own twisted purposes, they haven't approached the Baron and his delegation yet."

The Baron rose to take his leave. "Recover my little brain child, Acting Sergeant," he said, "so that Liechtenstein may stand shoulder to shoulder with Canada once more."

When the Baron had left, Wickett spread a newspaper on his desk. Then he took a grouse from his *In* basket, handed another to Bullock, and began to pluck.

"The Ambassador was in a foul mood today," he said, after a bit. "Had to take his dog to the vet. Bird shot in the hind quarters. 'Cut out the cigarettes, Wickett,' he shouted. 'I may fall back on you.' The last time I retrieved for him he claimed that smoking had dulled my sense of smell." Wickett

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laid the plucked grouse in his *Out* basket and took another.

"By the way," he said, "I hope you realize that Ottawa sees more at stake here than a few postage stamps and a sonnet cycle. I mean, if the Ottawa Plan will work here with stamps, then why not on a global scale with disarmament and world peace? And wouldn't that be a feather in our national caps? Down the corridors of time, generations as yet unborn would bless Canada and the Ottawa Plan."

"Good godfrey!" exclaimed Bullock, plucking excitedly.

What Bullock wanted most as he left the Embassy was a good hot soak in the tub where he could mull things over. But suddenly he had the eerie feeling he was not being followed. Major Glinka was not there. Bullock squared his shoulders and strode off resolutely into the tangle of streets.

An hour later, footsore and weary, Bullock closed the door of his hotel room and saw the shoe lying in the middle of the floor. He tapped the sole against his palm reflectively.

"A shoe," he said.

When he had started the water in the tub and tossed in a handful of bubble-bath crystals ("My only vice," as he liked to say), Bullock sat on the edge of the tub with the shoe in his hand, turning it first this way, then that, as one might a bothersome piece in a jigsaw puzzle. The ideas weren't coming. Time to slip into his scarlet tunic for a bit.

Inside the clothes closet stood Glinka, towering over him. Then the big Albanian slipped from the hook and fell, heavy and unconscious, into Bullock's arms. The back of his head was matted with blood.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Bullock—for one of Glinka's shoes was missing.

At that moment a small police van, its two-tone siren wailing, screeched to a stop in front of the hotel. Carabinièri spilled out onto the street. Quickly, Bullock dragged his burden into the bathroom and hoisted it into the half-filled tub. He turned the water on full blast and threw in another handful of bubble-bath crystals, frothing up a hill of bubbles which he peaked up carefully above Glinka's head.

The door burst open and an officer wearing sunglasses and carrying a large pistol came into the room. A dozen carabinièri filed in behind, dragging their rifles.

"Lieutenant Gelatti," said the officer with a tired salute. "There has been a report of foul play. Your passport, please."

Gelatti sprawled on the bed and paged through the passport with the barrel of his pistol. "To Gelatti," he said, "you do not look like a Hudson Bay blanket salesman, Mr. Jones." He signaled his men, who began breaking things open with their rifle butts.

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"Suppose Gelatti said he believed you to be"—the officer fumbled for a slip of paper—"Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the RCMP?"

Bullock shook his head. "You flatter me," he said.

"Then," said Gelatti, "how do you explain that?"

A carabinière was holding up Bullock's uniform for the admiration of his companions.

Bullock mumbled something about a mistake at the cleaners. Out of the corner of his eye he was watching two suspicious carabinièri in the bathroom who had fixed bayonets to put the bubbles to a closer test.

Suddenly a shot rang out. While trying on Bullock's broadbrimmed Mountie hat, a carabinière had dropped his rifle which had discharged, shooting another in the leg.

Gelatti shouted in exasperated Italian. The carabinièri filed quickly out of the room, carrying their wounded and weeping comrade.

Gelatti stretched luxuriously on the bed. Then he smiled and snapped his fingers. "Gelatti and Mr. Jones shall play a little game," he said. "We shall pretend that you are this Bullock."

"You mean just pretend?" said Bullock. "No harm in that—in fact, it might be fun."

"You like Gelatti's little game, eh, Acting Sergeant?" laughed Gelatti.

Bullock laughed right back and assuming a deeper voice, said, "Fire away, Lieutenant."

"Well," said the officer, "Gelatti sometimes moonlights. The same day he learned of the disappearance of a certain sheaf of paper, he was engaged by Susman, the Albanian Ambassador, to follow the movements of the illusive Mr. Serge, local head of the Yugoslav Secret Police. So he asked himself, 'Gelatti, do the Albanians suspect Serge of possessing this valuable sheaf of paper?'

"But then Gelatti discovered that Serge was following Susman. 'Can it be,' thought Gelatti, 'that neither has the manu—er—sheaf of paper. So it occurred to Gelatti that by pooling their information he and this Bullock might recover the papers and sell them to the highest bidder. Or would that be naughty?"

"If I was the man I'm pretending to be," said Bullock, "I'd say"—he assumed the deeper voice again—"Lieutenant Gelatti, you are a disgrace to your uniform and I hurl your filthy proposition back in your teeth."

"Then you have signed Acting Sergeant Bullock's death warrant," said Gelatti, raising his pistol.

"First hear him out," said Bullock, "because if he were here he'd probably say something like this."

Then Bullock spoke eloquently of the honor and traditions of the RCMP, sketched the history of the Force and elaborated on the

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red, blue, and yellow of the uniform, symbolizing sacrifice, constancy, and virtue in general. As he spoke he had the satisfaction of seeing the pistol lowered. When he finished, Gelatti was asleep on the bed.

Bullock saw he wasn't going to get his bath. But it looked like a good time to grab a bite to eat. He threw another handful of bubble-bath crystals into the tub and left.

There was a restaurant across from the hotel. Bullock ordered a ham sandwich and a bottle of ale but had to make do with Italian beer. The sandwich was made of a foot-long loaf of bread whose crust resisted his gnawing teeth.

As Bullock sipped the unsatisfactory beer and tried to sort out his thoughts, his eyes wandered to a tropical-fish tank separating his table from the next. Tiny bright fishes cavorted about a seashell castle. Then he saw the eye watching furtively through the seaweed.

Bullock blinked. The eye vanished, reappearing immediately in the head of a short man with stainless-steel teeth standing by Bullock's table.

"I am Ambassador Susman," the man said. "Care to match wits, Acting Sergeant?"

Bullock nodded him to a chair.

"Always meet an opponent face to face," said Susman with a metallic smile. "It helps you to understand his mind, his hopes, his fears. Similarly, if you tell me what a man carries in his suitcase, I'll tell you his weaknesses."

Bullock thought of his bubble-bath crystals, but refrained from saying anything.

"Come now, what have you done with Major Glinka?" said Susman. "And how did you outwit Lieutenant Gelatti?"

Bullock grinned cryptically.

Susman smiled again. "I hope you realize I am quite desperate," he said. "You see, I have enemies at home who want me recalled to some obscure desk in the Ministry of Sheep. To thwart them I needed a masterstroke—the theft of the Stollmeyer sonnets. Interfere now and I will crush you."

"That's big talk," said Bullock. "But a little birdie tells me you don't have the sonnets."

"I wonder how much else you know," mused Susman admiringly.

Bullock gnawed on his sandwich.

"You're inscrutable, Acting Sergeant," said Susman. He rubbed his hands together. "What I wouldn't give to have you back at the Embassy where I could pick your brain."

Bullock shuddered behind his impassive exterior.

"True, the sonnets are not yet in my hands," said Susman. "But by tomorrow they will be. There is no way you can prevent that. I am the only one who can pay their price."

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Glinka came into the restaurant, water squeaking in his shoes and dripping from his fierce mustache.

"Ah, Glinka, my boy," said Susman. "I was so worried I sent Gelatti up after you. Is it raining?"

Glinka glowered at Bullock. "Someone was there in the dark," he said. Someone struck me from behind while I was taking off my shoe. Someone left me to drown in the bathtub. As for Gelatti, he was dead on the bed when I came to."

"Asleep," said Bullock. "Let's just say I put Gelatti to sleep."

"Unbelievable!" said Susman. "Glinka, can we let so dangerous an adversary run loose?" From his pocket he drew a cigarette lighter in the form of a pistol and pointed it at Bullock. "We had better take him back with us."

"I know a lighter when I see one," scoffed the Mountie.

"This is a rather ingenious invention of the novelties division of our Secret Police," said Susman. "It is a pistol disguised as a lighter disguised as a pistol. Quite as deadly as Glinka's fountain pen there." The big Albanian menaced Bullock with an ominous-looking pen.

Bullock tried for a hearty laugh. "Did you think I'd walk into a trap like this unarmed?" he said. Snatching the sandwich off his plate, he leveled it at Susman's heart. "One false move and you're a dead man," he said. For Glinka's benefit he added, "This is a repeater."

"He's bluffing," shouted Glinka.

Looking down the barrel of the sandwich, Susman began to sweat. "Perhaps," he said. "And perhaps not. A fifty-fifty chance. How humiliating to be shot by a sandwich." He lowered his pistol-lighter-pistol. "You win this round, Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock," he said. "But we shall meet again."

Bullock backed out the door, keeping them covered with the sandwich.

A young woman with soft brown eyes and a large pigtail of blonde hair was sitting on Bullock's bed. "I'm Regina Stollmeyer, Acting Sergeant," she said. "Your door was open, so I just came in. I only arrived in San Marino a half hour ago. When father told me there was a real Mountie on the case, I dashed right over. I've something to tell you."

"Shoot," said Bullock.

Regina Stollmeyer seemed to have trouble beginning.

"I'll bet you expected me to be wearing my uniform," he said. "Maybe this will convince you." He put on his broadbrimmed hat. "Better?"

"I think it is, somehow," she said and taking a deep breath, she began. "First off, Rudy did not steal the sonnets."

"Better minds than yours have

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decided otherwise, Miss," said Bullock.

"Then they're wrong," she said. "I know because I stole the sonnets myself."

Bullock blinked. "Perhaps you'd better begin at the beginning," he said.

"It was love at first sight between Rudy and me," she said. "He was like a little boy—so serious, so determined, so bent on perfecting his craft. And he had this little lock of hair that kept falling down over his eyes. During his stay at the castle we went cycling every day. One morning we noticed two men on a scooter following us at a distance."

Bullock nodded. "A Vespa with diplomatic license plates," he said.

"Later, when we stopped to rest," continued Regina, "they stopped a few yards away. The driver, a big man in a leather overcoat, called Rudy over and spoke to him in Albanian. All three began talking in a very animated way. The big man seemed to be threatening Rudy with his foot. When Rudy returned he told me they had just wanted directions to the nearest youth hostel. But for the next few days he was morose and complained of cramps in the stomach. Finally, I told him that if he loved me he'd tell me what was wrong.

"Well, his eyes filled with tears and he threw himself on the ground. He told me those men had been Albanian officials who had learned where he was staying. Unless Rudy stole father's sonnets they threatened to send him back to Albania and see that he never raced again. And racing is his life's work!

"Rudy's room was next to father's. In desperation the poor dear had been tunneling through the wall behind the cabinet, hiding the stones under his mattress and eating the mortar so the servants wouldn't notice. He planned to break through that very night and meet the Albanians early the next morning.

" 'Now listen very carefully, Rudy,' I said. 'You are not going to eat any more mortar. And you are not going to let father's awful poems fall into the hands of perfect strangers.' Well, Rudy's lower lip trembled and he began to fuss.

" 'Now listen, Rudy,' I said. 'Tomorrow morning you are going to meet those men and tell them that you are sorry, that you know you promised to steal the sonnets, but somebody else stole them first.'

"Well, Rudy looked at me in that fierce way of his that turns my knees to water. 'You ask a Belasco to lie?' he shouted. And he started in on how his family was descended from Philip II of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great, and even though his family had fallen on bad times since the death of Alexander, a Belasco had never been known to lie.

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"So I stole the sonnets myself, so Rudy wouldn't have to lie."

"But how did you do it?" said Bullock.

"I crept into father's room and oiled the castors on his bed," she said. "Then while he was asleep I pushed it gently over to the wall cabinet, used the key without taking it off his neck, then pushed the bed back."

"Diabolical," said Bullock admiringly.

"I only planned on keeping the sonnets for a few days until the Albanians read about the theft in the papers. But the next morning Rudy didn't come back. They're holding him captive in the cellar of the Albanian Embassy. This morning I received a letter that he smuggled out through one of the cleaning women who is a bicycle racing fan. Rudy wrote that he's starting another tunnel! Desperate, I called Ambassador Susman long distance and agreed to exchange the sonnets for Rudy at noon tomorrow. I've been driving ever since.

"But with you here we have one last chance. Can you free poor Rudy before tomorrow noon? Otherwise I'll have to give father's terrible sonnets to Susman who threatens to break all Rudy's fingers and toes so he can never ride a bicycle again."

An hour later Bullock and Wickett were sitting in the tiny white Fiat across from the Albanian Embassy.

"The street spirals down to the frontier, all right," said Wickett. "But I still don't like this one bit."

"Just be here tomorrow morning at six sharp," said Bullock. He struggled out of the car and took his bags from the back seat. "While we're at it," he said, "is there any chance of using another car? This one makes the whole thing look comical. I am risking my life, after all."

"There's a big black Hispano-Suiza some of the other Embassies rent for espionage work. I could hire that," said Wickett.

"That sounds more like it," said Bullock, and shaking Willett's hand he picked up his bags, squared his shoulders, and walked across the dark street to the Albanian Embassy.

Glinka opened the door and shifted an after-dinner matchstick from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Who is it, Glinka?" called Susman from within.

"It's a trick," said Glinka.

"It's Acting Sergeant Bullock," said Bullock. "I've decided you hold all the trump cards. I've come to defect."

Susman's head appeared in back of Glinka. "You realize," he said suspiciously, "that if you cross this threshold I can kill you at my whim and ship your body back to Albania in diplomatic pouches?"

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Bullock nodded and Susman motioned him inside, leading the way into an immense, decaying ballroom with gold columns flaking along the walls and the crystal wreckage of three chandeliers on the floor.

"I use this as my office," said Susman, indicating a card table and two folding chairs set up beneath crossed flags and portraits of Lenin, Mao Tse Tung, and a third person whom Susman referred to vaguely as "The Father of My Country."

Susman sat behind the table. "Now tell me again why you want to defect."

"Couldn't we talk about that in the morning?" said Bullock. "I don't know about you, but I'm tired and ready to turn in." Susman insisted. "Well," said Bullock, "my superiors don't appreciate me and they hint I'm a bungler. Well, I say the heck with them all." He hoped he wasn't laying it on too thick.

"What are we waiting for?" shouted Glinka with childlike impatience. "Let's kill him now."

"Quiet, you fool," said Susman. "I'm having a brainstorm." He placed a hand over his eyes. A moment later he peeked through his fingers at Bullock. "Has a Royal Canadian Mountie ever defected before?"

"Not in recorded history," said Bullock.

"Excellent," said Susman and he ordered Bullock into his uniform. "Go get your camera, Glinka," he said. "This shall be the proof of his good faith."

First Glinka photographed Bullock and Susman shaking hands. Next Susman ordered Bullock to pose saluting, in turn, the portraits of Lenin, Mao, and "What's-his-name, The Father of My Country." Finally, a smiling Bullock had his picture taken holding a small Albanian flag between thumb and forefinger.

"Excellent," said Susman. "Tomorrow the Stollmeyer sonnets will be ours and the defeat of the Ottawa Plan assured. But here we have the means of breaking the back of Canadian prestige in this hemisphere once and for all. On Monday the newspapers of the world will carry these photographs under banner headlines: *Mountie Defects to Albania.*"

"If I can't kill him, at least let me lock him up," said Glinka, shaking a ring of keys under Bullock's nose.

"Fool," said Susman. "Where would he run to? Who would take in a renegade Mountie? And think of the fine figure he'll make lecturing in full uniform to our Junior Communists League: 'I was a Fawning Lackey for the Bourgeoisie Inside the Arctic Circle.' Right, Bullock?"

"I've always liked working with children," said Bullock.

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Susman did a little dance. "This is my night of triumph," he said. "A masterstroke doubled and redoubled! We are going to celebrate. Do you like parties, Bullock?"

Bullock yawned and stretched. "I'm a bit sleepy," he said. "I thought I might turn in."

"Nonsense," said Susman. "We are going to have an Albanian fiesta." He clapped his hands. "Glinka, an Albanian fiesta for three."

Glinka left the room muttering.

"We Albanians are a very festive people," said Susman. "We like to drink and sing and dance. But we are also hot-blooded and when we drink we become belligerent. And so our ancestors devised the Albanian fiesta. Ah, here we are."

Glinka had returned with three bottles of plum brandy on a tray.

Susman handed a bottle to Bullock and took one himself. "True joy is best savored in solitude," he said. "Now Glinka will show you to your room and he will go to his and I to mine. Then the three of us will drink and sing each by himself. Enjoy your fiesta, Bullock. In the morning we will talk about your future."

Bullock sat on the bed. By two in the morning the sound of breaking glass was still coming from Susman's room down the hall, while next door Glinka crooned an Albanian shepherd's song over and over. "It's past your bedtime, Maynard," he heard Mrs. Bullock say. So Bullock broke into *Allouette* to keep awake.

An hour later a distant crash told him that Susman had finally fallen to the floor, dragging furniture with him. Bullock stopped singing and lay there listening to Glinka's little melody which sounded more and more like *The Whiffenpoof Song* by the minute.

At ten minutes to six Bullock awoke with a start as Glinka's bottle smashed to the floor. For five long minutes he listened to the silence. Then Bullock picked up his bags and crept on tiptoe into the big Albanian's room.

Glinka was lying fully clothed on the bed. With infinite care Bullock removed the key ring from the sleeping man's pocket. "Baa, baa, baa," crooned Glinka.

At the end of a winding passageway in the cellar Bullock discovered a locked door with a bicycle leaning beside it. A minute later he was trotting back up the passageway alongside the pedaling Rudy Belasco.

"I'll miss my tunnel," said Belasco. "I find mortar is actually quite wholesome and nourishing."

"We've no time to argue about that now," said Bullock, for rounding the next corner they came face to face with Glinka.

"I was only feigning sleep," shouted the big Albanian, going down on one knee to unsheath a

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lethal foot. "Now I will kill you!"

Bullock took a defensive stance. "Put up your dukes and fight like a man."

"Bourgeois sentimentalist!" roared Glinka, struggling with both hands to pull off his shoe. "I have a knot in my shoelace," he added quietly, as if to explain the delay.

"Quick!" shouted Bullock and he leaped, bags and all, on the back of Belasco's bicycle which sped past the raging Albanian.

An alarm bell clanged inside the Embassy as they crowded into the back seat of the waiting Hispano-Suiza. "Head for the frontier, Wickett!" shouted Bullock.

"I'm afraid I'm the elusive Mr. Serge of the Yugoslav Secret Police," said the man behind the wheel. In one hand he held a gun. He opened the other hand to display a ball of fluff. "See that? That's three hours under your bed, Acting Sergeant. It was I who stuffed Glinka in your clothes closet. When I heard you in the hall, I hid under your bed. Gelatti's falling asleep and the arrival of Miss Stollmeyer trapped me there, so I heard all. Now the precious Mr. Belasco is mine. Now future generations will bless the Belgrade Plan and Yugoslavia for—"

The Hispano-Suiza was struck hard from behind. Serge's head bounced off the windshield. He slid to the floor.

A smiling woman in a flowered hat got out of the tiny white Fiat. "Acting Sergeant Bullock?" she said. "I'm Mrs. Wickett. My husband couldn't make it. The Ambassador went grousing and needed a retriever. And I'm afraid the car you wanted was already rented."

As Bullock and Belasco dragged the bicycle out of the Hispano-Suiza, a siren approached in the distance.

Baron Stollmeyer bowed and smiled to them from the front seat of the Fiat. "I met the Baron out walking," said Mrs. Wickett, getting back behind the wheel. "He hadn't been invited to his own daughter's elopement."

"I'm addicted to early morning walks," said the Baron, as Bullock and Belasco forced the bicycle into the back seat of the Fiat. "At one time I wanted to be a milkman."

"The laugh's on us," said Bullock. "We'll have to get in first and pull the bicycle in afterwards."

Susman came running out of the Embassy in his shirt sleeves. "Bullock," he shouted. "You can't do this! Remember the photographs."

Bullock squeezed into the back seat. "You're in for a surprise when you get them developed," he said. "In every shot I've got my fingers crossed as plain as day."

A police van entered the bottom of the street. Lieutenant Gelatti and his men lined up from curb to curb, rifles ready.

"Let's get out of here," shouted Bullock.

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Mrs. Wickett drove straight down into the muzzles of the rifles. The carabinièri fired and jumped aside. A street lamp and two store windows shattered. Susman, running after the car, fell with a bullet in his leg. The Fiat squealed into the first turn in its spiral descent to the frontier.

"This is exciting!" shouted Mrs. Wickett.

"An elopement is always an adventure," said the Baron.

"We've got company," said Bullock. The Hispano-Suiza was behind them with Glinka at the wheel. He waved an empty shoe at them menacingly.

"I suppose that Lieutenant Gelatti will give me a ticket for this," said Mrs. Wickett.

"You are not only speeding but driving down the middle of the street," said Bullock. He dreaded the open country between the city limits and the frontier where Glinka could easily force them off the road.

"Here we go again!" shouted Belasco as they rounded a turn on two wheels.

Gelatti and his men were emerging from a side street and lining up as before. Mrs. Wickett squealed with delight.

"If they fix bayonets we're done for," shouted Bullock. But once more the carabinièri fired and jumped quickly aside. A web of cracks appeared in the windshield of the Hispano-Suiza which swerved out of control and up onto the terrace of a sidewalk café where a waiter with a fixed smile and a basket of breakfast rolls hurried over to it.

Lieutenant Gelatti ran out into the street and in a fine gesture saluted the departing Fiat.

When Regina Stollmeyer and Rudy Belasco had disappeared from sight on their bicycles, Mrs. Wickett, the Baron, and his sonnets headed back across the frontier to San Marino.

Bullock sat on a suitcase by the roadside. Suddenly he heard a shot and a shout: "Fetch, Wickett! Fetch!" The distant figure of a running Wickett emerged from the underbrush followed by the Ambassador with a shotgun. Bullock waved a scarlet arm but they passed on without seeing him.

Well, his work was done here. "You did it, Maynard," Mrs. Bullock would say. But this time a chorus of voices would be joined to hers—the unborn generations who would bless Canada and the great Ottawa Plan.

Bullock was embarrassed to find a lump in his throat as he flagged down the bus to Rimini with his broadbrimmed hat.

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the *NEWEST* crime story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

Another in Anthony Gilbert's new series of "pure" crime stories—although there are variations in technique in this one. Anthony Gilbert's crime stories cannot be called "inverted detective stories"—not by any stretch; perhaps they could be called "converted detective stories," or possibly "diverted detective stories." But whatever new name might be found for them, they are always searching studies of people, sharp photos of crimes committed or to be committed.

In this newest story the background is mosaically depicted, and so convincingly that the story gives a sense of first-hand knowledge of the milieu—in this instance, The Folly, a kind of nursing home for aging women—no mental cases, of course, and "only the best people" . . .

CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS

by ANTHONY GILBERT

I WANT TO WRITE EVERYTHING down now, while the facts are still clear in my mind, before time and the usual routine have dulled the edges—or before I begin to tell myself it can't be true. Because that would be the final betrayal. And there's no time to lose because Miss Emily will try to get in first, and there's no question which of us Mrs. Gates will listen to.

Not that it matters, as I don't mean to stay in any event. I shall ask for my cards first thing, and then I shall go to London. Newspapers must have records going back and back, even 20 years, and before I start thinking what to do next I want to know everything—everything that happened . . .

Here goes, then. My name is Caroline Flynn, and I've been a nurse at Gates's Folly for the past two years. It's not a real nursing home—there are only two professionals on the staff, and even we don't wear uniforms in the ordinary way. The "guests" are all aging women who can't cope any longer and whose families would sooner open their purses than their front doors. No mental cases, you understand, and Mrs. Gates advertises that she takes only the best people.

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It's one of her rules that if a guest needs constant nursing—illness or accident, say—she either goes to the hospital or has a "special" at her own expense, and as most of them are terrified of finding their rooms let in their absence they generally opt for a "special." These come from a local Nursing Register and you take what you can get.

I was surprised rather than flattered when Mrs. Gates told me that Emily Brown—Miss Emily we called her—had asked if she could have me for her special when she broke her hip. Mrs. Gates looked a bit surprised, too, but then I was never one of her pets.

"It's against my normal practice," she said, "but in this instance I have agreed. Miss Brown tells me she finds it very difficult to accustom herself to strangers."

What she meant, of course, was that the old thing would wear out a special in 48 hours, whereas on the staff you have to take it and look as if you liked it.

Old Emily was all abeam. "I'm so glad Matron agreed to my little suggestion," she said.

Mind you, I didn't care at the time—quite a change, I thought, from the endless round of bedpans and tea trays which is what being a nurse in this sort of establishment entails—which is why you never find the dedicated kind on the staff. But by the second week I was wondering how soon I could ask to be relieved. Any special can ask for an exchange of patients at the end of a month, or even three weeks if it's very heavy work; but I didn't fancy Mrs. Gates's expression if I tried to opt out after only ten days.

The trouble about being a special is you're on duty all the working day, and it was the incessant yap, yap, yap and never a chance to talk to anyone else that was getting me down. Miss Emily was rather an unusual person to find at The Folly —I mean, there was nothing of the "best families" about her. When she told me she'd been a governess I said, "I thought they went out with Jane Eyre," but she said that there are still pockets out in the long grass where two or three households will club together and share a governess—till the kids are old enough to go to prep. school, that is.

"Didn't you ever want to work in a school?" I said, but she told me, a bit frostily, that she preferred living with a family.

"Mine's been a lonely life," she invited, but I wasn't being drawn. I could have told her something about loneliness, having been on my own since my mother married the last of the "uncles" who were our protectors. I haven't seen her—my mother, I mean—for nearly 15 years. But that sort of story doesn't do you any good, so I kept my trap shut.

"Why don't any of your pupils ever come to see you?" I asked, because that was another thing—she never had any visitors. Most

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of the guests had sisters or daughters or nieces who drove up in posh cars and started yelling like banshees before they were over the doorstep how lucky Mums or Auntie Flo or darling Irene was to be here, waited on hand and foot—but Miss Emily, no. And her only letters were official envelopes that came once a month—from a lawyer, we decided.

"Do think what you're saying, Caroline. Do you ever give a thought to your schoolteachers now you're grown up?" She began to laugh, wobbling like jelly; she's half the size of an elephant, anyway.

But if Miss Emily's pupils didn't remember her she never stopped thinking about them. They were her hobby. She kept a huge scrapbook into which she pasted every reference to them she could track down, and sometimes, if it was a fairly ordinary name, she'd take a chance and put it in.

"Sir William Jones," she'd say. "I wonder if that could be little Willie Jones—he's just the sort who would get a K.C.B." And out would come the scrapbook and she'd put a stubby finger on the photograph of some ugly little kid of about seven and ask me, "Don't you see the likeness?" They mostly looked like zoo specimens to me; but I had to hand it to her—she could tell them apart.

It was one of my chores to go through the social pages of the *Record* and the *Post* every day and read out engagements, weddings, and obituaries. Now and again she discovered one of her darlings wasn't really one of her little pets, and then whole columns had to be ripped out and she more or less went into mourning for the day. I tell you, it would have got the Marx Brothers down. It got so that every day was 48 hours long and every hour had 100 minutes.

I was even thankful when I had to give her a rubdown against bed sores or brush her scraggly locks. Roll on, Death, I'd think, because where's the sense in people like her? I bet nothing important had ever happened to her in 70 years. Only it turned out I was wrong . . .

It's still hard to believe that it's only a few hours since the whole world turned topsy-turvy. The day had seemed just as usual—yap, yap, natter, natter. Then her weekly *Gossip* arrived and I started to go through it, and I came to a dead stop.

I'd seen the picture of a girl who looked as every girl looks in her private dream. She was beautiful, and her happiness stuck out like a broken bone. I was so absorbed by her I didn't realize at first that Miss Emily was talking.

"Taking a nap, Caroline?" My head came up with a jerk; it was staggering to realize that the same world could hold two such different people.

"Take a dekko," I offered, passing

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her the paper. "Beauty without the beast. Did you ever?"

She stared at it for a minute. The caption said: *Miss Jane Rush, daughter of the late Richard Rush and Lady (John) Heather, whose engagement to*—someone-or-other—*has just been announced.*

"Well?" I demanded. "Knocks you for six, doesn't she?"

Miss Emily's unfocused gaze came back to my face. "She's very pretty," she admitted, "but not a patch on her mother at the same age."

"Do me a favor," I began, but she was bawling for her scrapbook, and when I brought it to her she began digging through the pages like a dog hunting for a bone, and panting like a dog, too.

"There!" she said, and I looked, and believe it or not, she was right. This girl was Jane Plus, if you can credit it. Except that she hadn't got the glow—as if she swung the earth like a trinket at her wrist.

This caption read: *Miss Rose Benyon, niece of the dead woman.* And under it, in Miss Emily's stubby black script: *Dear Rose at the time of the case.*

"What case was that?" I asked. "Who was the dead woman and how did she die?" Because it was obvious there was a mystery here; you don't get your picture in the paper just because you're a raving beauty and your aunt is dead.

"Oh, it was a long time ago," Miss Emily murmured—and already she was halfway across the border between the past and the present. "Harriet Benyon died of an overdose of sleeping pills and—"

"And someone suggested she hadn't taken them herself?" I began to wake up; this was the first promising conversation I'd ever had with Miss Emily.

"Of course she took them herself. The question was whether it was by design or accident, and that's a point no one has ever cleared up."

"Why should she take them on purpose?" I asked. (And if she had, wouldn't she have left a note or something? They say suicides always do.)

"It's a long story," said Miss Emily evasively. But she was in a state of excitement—you could see that with half an eye.

"We've got a long time till supper," I reminded her.

They say you need the patience of Job to catch a salmon, but Job wasn't in it with me trying to winkle the story out of Emily Brown. Still, in the end, she capitulated. In a sense, she was burning to talk about it. It wasn't always easy to follow her—she kept dodging about, saying She did this and She thought that, until it was difficult to know who She was. But this is what it boiled down to . . .

Harriet Benyon and Emily Brown met during the war when they were both in London. All the kids had been evacuated, of course, and Miss

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Emily had a job in some Government Department—in those days a monkey could have got a job provided it hadn't got a tail—and the two of them worked in the same room.

Why Harriet hadn't gone down to the country when her darling Rose was evacuated with her school was anyone's guess. She didn't need the money—she had £30,000 that were eventually to come to Rose; perhaps she was a patriot, whatever that may be when it's at home.

Anyhow, Harriet and Emily met and later, when a bomb destroyed Emily's *pension*, she moved into a vacant room in Miss Benyon's flat. At the end of the war, when Miss Emily was wondering "What next?" —private governesses of 50 were "out" and temporary civil servants of the same age were ten a penny —Miss Benyon told her she'd be buying a house in the country for herself and dear Rose, and if she liked, Miss Emily could come along, too.

"As a chatelaine," Miss Emily told me, which is French for cook-housekeeper. But she accepted.

"Even before I saw Rose, I was really tired of London, and once I met her I'd have done it for half the money."

Because it was a case of love at first sight. Rose must have been about the same age as the girl in the *Gossip* picture—"Of all the girls I ever met she was the one I would have wanted for my own daughter," Old Emily said.

And Miss Benyon seems to have felt the same way, so it wasn't surprising if Rose wanted a life of her own. She didn't have to work—her baker's bill would be paid for her all her days, and with her looks she could have got married once a week even without any money; but all the young people were working now, and Rose wanted to be "with it."

Miss Benyon was one of those dominating spinsters—you meet a lot in the nursing profession—who wanted the best for their darlings; but it had to be *their* best, and the best, in her opinion, was Sir John Heather.

"I always thought she was somewhat precipitate," Miss Emily said. "Dear Rose was very young, and to nineteen anyone of thirty-five must seem quite elderly."

Thirty-five! My age precisely. Thank *you*, Miss Brown, I thought.

Anyway, on this point Rose and her aunt didn't see eye to eye. Rose's fancy had fallen on a man named Richard Rush.

"He was a painter," explained Miss Emily, meaning an artist. "In those days he was quite unknown—it was only after his death in an air crash that they began holding posthumous exhibitions of his work, and now I believe even a small canvas of his is quite valuable."

I knew something about Richard Rush. I'd once nursed the wife of

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a picture dealer, and they thought he was the tops. Mind you, I couldn't see it myself. I mean, there'd be three panels of black paint, called "Soul's Progress," and if you asked what that meant you'd be told, "Can't you see each panel is a different shade of black?"

Goodness knows, I wasn't carrying any banners for Miss Benyon but I couldn't help seeing her point, particularly as it turned out that this Rush creature was anything but cooperative. He had no money and he didn't seem interested in earning any. Miss Benyon discovered that he'd turned down a contract with a big advertising firm—paintings for a brewery, I think they were—on the ground that he was an artist, not a publican's pimp, and there was too little time in one life to waste on commercial art.

"He really didn't care about money," Miss Emily insisted. "Harriet used to say he wanted Rose for what she had, but I'm still sure she was wrong."

"I know about these fellows who're too superior to be interested in money," I told Miss Emily. "It doesn't stop them being interested in food and clothes and even luxuries here and there. They just don't want to know who pays for such things."

"Perhaps people like ourselves don't understand artists," Miss Emily said. "Mind you, I did think he might have used a little more finesse—a great deal depended on Harriet, so he could have shown a *little* tact."

Done a little bootlicking, that was what she meant. I decided Miss Benyon had been a proper old bitch, and I almost wished Rose *had* poisoned her; then I remembered someone had and I cheered up again.

"Nothing would shake Harriet from her conviction that what he wanted was Rose's money. So she decided to let her see what would happen if he knew that Rose wouldn't have a penny. She actually wrote to Mr. Cass, her lawyer, telling him she was going to redraft her will, leaving everything to the National Trust; she said people could disappoint or betray, but the land was always faithful."

"Didn't she care a bit about Rose's happiness?" I asked, since it was obvious the girl was over the moon with love.

"You mustn't think that, Caroline; it was just that she believed this was the best way to preserve it. Personally, I didn't think Mr. Cass would allow her to do it."

"And did he?" I asked.

"It never got to that. He was away for a few days just then and by the time he came back the fat was in the fire—that is, Miss Benyon was dead."

I'll swear that by this stage Miss Emily didn't even notice me as an individual; she'd gone back 20 years, and now she was like someone on a runaway horse—she couldn't stop

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if she wanted to. Not that I wanted her to: I never could put down a mystery book till I'd read the last chapter.

"I'll never forget that day," she said. "It was a Wednesday—I remember particularly because it was the cheap ticket day on the railways. I was going up to London to meet a pal I'd made in the war. She'd married and gone overseas, but she was back for a few days, and we'd had this arrangement for some time. I was on tenterhooks in case Miss Benyon wouldn't let me go. She'd slipped on some polished linoleum a few days before and broken her ankle which, while not dangerous, made her pretty helpless. It was because of that she had the sleeping pills.

"I used to give her two each evening, because the doctor said it was important she should sleep well. That was Dr. Moss—she could twist him round her finger."

And, of course, it's never wise to offend a rich patient, I thought.

Miss Emily was charging ahead. "Did I say that Rose had left the house by this time? She'd joined a friend in a flat; she said she might not be able to get married without her aunt's consent—she was two years under age, you remember—but that didn't mean she had to live under the same roof.

"Well, the day came and I think Miss Benyon rather hoped I might offer to stay on, but I didn't. There was Maria—she was the maid, and come what might Miss Benyon always had a servant whoever else might go without; and I took care of absolutely everything before I left—changed her library book, filled her thermos with hot milk, in case I missed the earlier of the two return trains, left everything spick and span. She was an absolute gorgon about neatness in a sickroom, and off I went.

"Of course, I missed the earlier train back—well, my friend and I had a lot to talk about; she'd married a psychologist and she had plenty to say about Miss Benyon's attitude toward Rose—I only wish I could have repeated some of it to Harriet.

"So, as I was telling you, it was quite late when I got back. Maria was in the hall, obviously bursting with some sensation. I had an awful feeling Harriet might have tried to get out of bed and fallen and broken her other ankle, but it was nothing like that. She's all right, Maria told me, though it's lucky for her she's got a heart like a stone. If it had been you or me, Miss Brown, with all that hammer-and-tonging till I thought the roof would fly off, we'd be flat out on our backs; but not Miss Benyon.

"I couldn't imagine what she was talking about. I knew Harriet far too well to suppose she'd indulge in a slanging match with the servant. And of course I was right. Maria said scornfully, 'I wouldn't waste

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the breath, Miss Brown. No, it was Miss Rose.'

"I caught hold of the bannisters. I thought I was going to pass out. 'Rose—here?' I said, and Maria grinned. It appears Rose had turned up without so much as a phone call. She must have known I wouldn't be there, because she told Maria she thought it was a good opportunity to talk to her aunt without interruption, and up she went and the hammer-and-tonging began.

"Mind you, I should discount at least half of what Maria said—even the part she repeated on oath; she couldn't possibly have heard, unless she had her ear up against the door the whole time. I never *did* like that girl."

"You can't blame her," I urged. "There's not all that drama in life, you know."

Any other time Miss Emily would have fired up at that, but like I said, she didn't even realize I was there. If I'd turned into a bedpost she wouldn't have noticed the difference.

"One of the things she repeated was—'You'll only marry him over my dead body.' That was Harriet, of course. And Rose's reply, 'If that's the only way I can get him, that's the way it'll have to be.' When Maria took in the tea tray Harriet said, 'You should have brought a little arsenic with you, my dear.' Still, they must have come to some kind of terms because Rose stayed quite late—waiting to see me, according to Maria.

"When at last she came down she said to Maria, 'Miss Benyon won't be wanting any supper. She'll just have her milk, and she's got a tin of biscuits. And when Miss Brown comes in, she doesn't want to be disturbed. I've given her two sleeping pills and put the bottle on the shelf.'

"That last sentence," brooded Miss Emily, "turned out to be the crux of the case. I peeped in on my way up to bed, all the same. Maria might say Miss Benyon didn't want to be disturbed, but if by any chance the pills hadn't worked and she was lying awake and she heard me go by—well, she'd have blown me skyhigh next morning.

"I went in like a mouse. The little blue lamp was on as always—she couldn't bear to sleep in the dark. But there wasn't a sound from the bed. I took off my shoes and crept round in my stockinged feet. I just tidied things up—she was a terrible fusser, said she couldn't bear waking up in the morning surrounded by the paraphernalia of the sickroom. I washed the thermos and glass, straightened the counterpane, and put a bottle back on the shelf."

"The sleeping pills?" I asked.

"I don't know. That's the truth, I honestly don't know. There was another bottle, some medicine she used to take, and they were very much alike. Of course, in daylight it was easy to distinguish them, be-

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cause one had a red label and one a white; but in that blue gleam and being anxious to get away before she woke up and started telling me about Rose, I simply didn't notice. That's what I told them at the inquest."

"Did they believe you?" I asked, and she said simply, "They must have or they wouldn't have brought in the verdict they did. Death from the administration of an overdose, without sufficient evidence to show how this was administered—something long-winded like that. The coroner, who was dead set against Rose from the start, tried to bully me. It's no use, I told him, I wasn't sure when I came into this court and nothing's happened to make me any surer now.

"Rose was legally represented—I saw to that. Her counsel insisted that it would be an easy mistake for a girl who wasn't accustomed to a sickroom."

I saw she had just jumped over the actual death. "Was it you who found her?" I said. "Miss Benyon, I mean."

"No, that was Maria. I found myself so disturbed by the news that Rose had been there in my absence that I took a sleeping pill myself—not one of Harriet's—and the next thing I knew Maria was shaking my shoulder and screaming like a banshee. Stop that noise, I told her, it's enough to wake the dead. Only it turned out that was the one thing it couldn't do.

"She'd gone in with a cup of early morning tea, and she couldn't rouse Harriet, and as soon as I got in, still feeling a bit muzzy, I understood why. Get Dr. Moss, I told her; don't give an opinion—we're not professionals—just tell him it's urgent.

"As a matter of fact, it was Dr. Moss's partner, Dr. Stewart, who came. Harriet could never endure him. Doctors should put on a sympathetic act even if they don't feel it, she used to say. And certainly he was a very brusque young man.

" 'I suppose it was her heart?' I said, and then that fool Maria started to yell that it was Rose who'd killed her.

" 'Stop having hysterics,' I commanded. If the doctor hadn't been there I'd have slapped her face. 'Don't pay any attention to Maria,' I went on, 'she doesn't know what she's saying.'

" 'I never heard you were a psychologist, Miss Brown,' Dr. Stewart said—it was no wonder that Miss Benyon couldn't take to him. 'And I should prefer Maria to tell me herself what she did mean.'

"So out it all came—Maria didn't miss a trick, she must have spent half her time listening at doors. Richard and Harriet and the money. She was like one of those old wives who know everything, but know most of it wrong. I broke in as soon as I could.

" 'What *did* she die of?' I insisted.

"And Stewart told me airily, 'I

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think we'll have to leave that to the coroner's jury, Miss Brown. Oh, yes, I shall have to report this as an "unnatural death." Don't say anything, either of you. The matter's really out of our hands now.'

"The thought of an autopsy being performed on poor Harriet made me feel quite ill, and I was quite sure Dr. Moss would never have agreed. And the result was everything I anticipated. Poor Rose!"

"I can imagine!" I could, too. I've lived in country communities, and I daresay before the inquest was over you wouldn't have been able to distinguish between Rose and Mrs. Dracula. In a sense you could say it was Miss Emily who saved Rose, by sticking to her story of not being certain which bottle she'd put away. Because so long as there was even the shadow of a doubt Rose was bound to get the benefit of it. And in the box she admitted she only *thought* she had put the pills away, that she could have picked up the other bottle.

"Did it come out about Miss Benyon changing her will?" I asked.

"Everything came out. They even said Rose had counted on Dr. Moss being called in—only she hadn't known he never made calls before nine thirty in the morning or after six at night—that's what he kept a young partner for.

"Oh, I did what I could, and poor Rose needed all the help she could get. She was like her namesake before it was over—all the petals wilting and the color dying out like a sunset."

"And I suppose, after the verdict, everyone said how lucky she was—getting away with murder, I mean. Still," I went on quickly, not much liking the look in Miss Emily's eye, "her Richard stuck to her, so he must have believed in her innocence."

Miss Emily seemed suddenly to become aware of me. "Are you still there, Caroline? What was that you said? Oh, about Richard. To tell you the truth, I don't believe he'd have cared either way. An extraordinary man. And he really did love her, as well as he could love anything after his art. About that he was like a man possessed."

"But the marriage worked?" I insisted, "They were happy?"

"I suppose so. To tell you the truth, I hardly saw her again. They were married almost at once and went to live in France. Rose was very grateful—you've nothing to be grateful for, I told her; I only said what was true. If I'd been lying to shield her, I mean, I'd have sworn they were the sleeping pills I removed.

"After she went to France it was as if a curtain came down, and she and Richard and their little girl, Jane, were all on the otherside of it. I suppose that was wise—it never does to give gossips the smallest crumb."

And of course, I reflected, there'll always be those who believed you perjured yourself on Rose's account.

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"Do you think she took the pills on purpose?" I said. "Miss Benyon, I mean. It seems rather drastic, even to be revenged on your own niece."

"I never allowed myself to believe that," said Miss Emily firmly. "I think she woke up later and probably wondered why I wasn't there, and then remembered about me going to London, and decided to take her own pills. If she'd had two already, she'd be pretty muzzy—it's often happened. The worst you could say against Rose was that she should have been careful to put them out of reach, but you can hardly blame her for Harriet's death. Harriet was a very forceful adult, not the sort of person who makes fatal mistakes."

"I suppose so," I said. I felt a bit let down. I like a story to have a proper end. That's why detective stories are so satisfactory: you always know in the end who did it.

"If I was writing this as a book," I said, and now our roles were reversed, with me thinking aloud and not paying much heed to Miss Emily, "I should do what's called a switcheroo—that is, the real murderer would be someone who'd been in the picture from the start, but was so obvious that no one thought of him."

"If you're thinking of Richard," began Miss Emily, startling me because I'd half forgotten *she* was there. But I interrupted, "Oh, no, that wouldn't be popular—he was never really on the stage at all, just one of those invisible characters everyone talks about and no one sees."

"Maria?" Miss Emily sounded scornful.

"I don't think she'd be important enough for the villain in a mystery book—not unless her part was blown up a good deal. Besides, she hadn't any motive. No," I said, smiling brilliantly (at the idea of me as a successful author) "in my book you'd have done it."

There was a moment of deathly silence, long enough to make me realize what I'd said. "I'm just explaining if it was a book," I said lamely.

"But that's fascinating," approved Miss Emily. "Do go on, Caroline. I was in London, of course—"

"Oh, that's no difficulty," I assured her. "Like the days when the victim was found shot and the murderer was forty miles away and it came out that he'd fixed a gun with a bit of string round the trigger, which went off when the door was opened. I mean, you could have put the stuff, a lethal dose, in the milk before you left, knowing you were going to be late and Miss Benyon would drink it, and then in you'd come and give her the second dose of pills."

"Suppose she'd waited for me to come back before she drank the milk?" asked Miss Emily.

"You could have dropped the second dose or something. And besides, no one would think it

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queer that you should have washed everything up before you went to bed, because you always did."

"Dear me!" said Miss Emily, "I shall have to be careful not to offend you, shan't I? A fertile brain like that. I shall be nervous of taking anything from you in future, Caroline."

I laughed. "What good would you do me dead?" I inquired. "I only have to give in my notice—if I want to get away, that is. There has to be a motive, and a good one."

"And you've worked one out for me to have poisoned Miss Benyon?"

"You adored Rose, and you saw that Miss Benyon meant to ruin her life. Greater love hath no man—it's no wonder you turned as white as a sheet when you heard Rose had come in, because it was never part of your plan for her to be involved. And then you saw your chance—about the medicine bottle; that was better really than telling the truth, because the jury might have thought you were trying to protect Rose."

I was so thrilled at what seemed to me the perfect logic of my argument that I hadn't even looked at Miss Emily. Now I lifted my eyes and saw the reflection of her face in the long pier glass facing the bed. And my heart nearly stopped beating. Because I'd never seen her look like that before.

I'd never seen any human face look like that, eyes wide and staring, mouth like a trap, hands balled into fists and pressed into the cheeks. Hate, I thought, that's what it is, and in the same instant I knew the reason why. It was because, groping about for a "book" explanation, I'd hit on the truth. I knew it as surely as I know I'm born and one day shall die.

I wondered if Rose had suspected it—she must have known *she* was innocent, and there could never be proof. Speculation in plenty—but not a speck of proof. Miss Emily must have counted on that. I knew then how it was she could afford to stay at The Folly, what was in those envelopes she received every month. And I knew, too, why Rose had never come back into Miss Emily's life, even after she married Sir John.

I thought I was going to faint, and that's the cardinal sin in the profession. Die on your feet if you must, but never let the patient guess. I put my head between my knees and I think I did black out for a moment or two.

The next thing I knew Miss Emily was saying, "You'd better drink this, Caroline," and she was offering me a spot of her precious brandy. Mrs. Gates didn't approve of patients keeping spirits in their rooms, but she couldn't actually forbid it, and for once I was thankful.

Miss Emily squizzed a little soda into the glass, and after a minute or so I began to feel normal again. I got up and started to put things

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straight; whatever happened, she mustn't guess that I knew.

"Do stop fidgeting, Caroline," Miss Emily said. "And put those down." Those were her own sleeping pills. "I'm not Miss Benyon."

"They're neater out of the way," I said. I didn't want the situation in reverse—Miss Emily found dead in her bed from an overdose, and me being censured for not expecting what she might do after she realized she'd given herself away.

"I blame myself," she said. "I can't think what came over me. It was seeing that photograph in *Gossip*, I suppose, but how could I guess it would have that effect on you? Digging up the past is always a mistake—you may not believe this, but for months on end I never even remember it. I believe Rose was happy in her marriage—she's got her child, and Sir John never wavered in his love and faith. He's a very important man now, so Rose has a very full life.

"I don't blame her in the least for never coming to see me—I can see you were thinking that was strange—she doesn't want to resurrect the past, either. Now, my dear, go and lie down for a little; if anyone came in they'd think you were the patient. Sometimes I wonder if you've chosen the right profession, Caroline. You need a sort of armor plating in your job."

Too right, I told myself, and first thing in the morning I'll tell Mrs. Gates I want to be taken off the case. I'll give in my notice—she won't mind if she can get someone else. I mean, you allow for a fair amount of disadvantages in any job—but you certainly don't reckon on waiting hand and foot on a murderess.

So here I am, finishing my report, and then I'll slip down and post it to myself—to Miss C. Flynn, Post Restante, Charing Cross. That way it'll be safe. And presently I'll start mapping out a campaign. I wonder if it's my duty to tell Sir John what I know. He might be glad to have his faith in his wife vindicated. That's something I'll have to think about when I'm up in town.

It was Nurse Horrocks on day duty who found Caroline the next morning. By that time she must have been dead for some hours. Cause of death—an overdose of sleeping pills.

From the beginning there was no doubt in the official mind that this was suicide. The only person who could have told them differently was the late Nurse Flynn's patient, Emily Brown, but all she said was, "What a dreadful thing! I wonder if I could have prevented it."

Mrs. Gates was furious—this kind of thing would do her sort of establishment immeasurable harm. So she snapped at Miss Brown. "Why should you suppose you could have prevented it?"

"Well," said Emily, spreading her

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hedgehog's paws on the sheet, "there was this guilt complex she had—oh, she never went into details, but it was something about some old woman she'd been nursing who'd taken an overdose of sleeping pills—a very remarkable coincidence, wouldn't you say? Or would a psychologist call it something else?"

"There's nothing to that effect on her record," snapped Mrs. Gates.

"Oh, I don't think anyone blamed her except herself. But she had the idea that if only she'd put the bottle out of reach the old woman wouldn't have died. But, of course, it's so easy to be wise after the event. Don't brood over the past, I used to tell her, all the past things are past and over, the deeds are done and the tears are shed."

"But why last night?" insisted Mrs. Gates. "She had no letters, no telephone calls."

"We were discussing a rather similar case—something she saw in a newspaper—and it started her off. Mind you, I can't supply any details, or even dates—I gather it was a long time ago; but it seemed to bring everything back. I really thought she was going off, so I offered her a drop of brandy—"

"Hot sweet tea is the acknowledged treatment for shock," Mrs. Gates informed her. "I'd have expected *you* to know that, Miss Brown."

"Ah, but where was I going to get hot sweet tea on the spur of the moment? Anyway, it was only a tablespoonful and then I told her to go and lie down. She really did look queer. Mrs. Gates."

"Well?"

"Do you think—could they have been *my* sleeping pills she used?"

"I suppose so, unless you know exactly how many you should have. In any case, as a resident nurse, she'd have access to the key of the poison cupboard, and could have helped herself."

One of the guests contributed that she'd seen Caroline Flynn creep out and post a letter the previous night, so that started fresh speculation. To the coroner? Suicides usually left a note behind. If not to the coroner, to some friend or relative? But if so, no one came forward, though the inquest was delayed to give any of them an opportunity.

"She was like me," said Miss Brown sadly. "A loner. I knew it from the start. I felt there might be an affinity . . ."

A mother, a Mrs. Vickers living up north, was eventually traced, and she reluctantly acknowledged that she and her daughter had been estranged for years. But she made the funeral arrangements and The Folly sent a wreath and Miss Brown sent another on her own account.

"The least I can do," she said.

Miss Brown's new special was a sensible bouncing woman of 40, who discouraged what she called "morbid talk."

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"You've had a shock, so the best thing you can do is not to think about it," she said. "And don't blame yourself. If people mean to take their own lives no one can stop them. Now why not take a little nap?"

"If you say so, nurse," said Miss Brown meekly.

She crossed her hands and closed her eyes. It had all passed off without a hitch. What a masterpiece that casual mention of the brandy, letting everyone assume that Caroline had taken it herself. It was surprising how easy murder could be if you didn't try to embroider or explain too much.

Miss Benyon and her hot milk 20 years ago.

And now Caroline Flynn and the brandy.

And no sense feeling any guilt for either of them. Harriet would have wrecked Rose's life, and she, Emily, had given it back to her. No need to feel squeamish about accepting a little income in return. You can't go on working forever. And Caroline—stupid girl—couldn't prevent herself from blurting out her suspicions; you could say she signed her own death warrant, and it wasn't as if there was any future, in the true meaning of the word, for a girl like that. As for the letter—that was probably in answer to an advertisement for another job; no need to give that a second thought.

Miss Brown slept peacefully.

And a good thing, too. Because the time is coming when sleep won't be easy for Miss Brown—not, not easy at all.

For what Miss Brown doesn't yet appreciate is that even official patience isn't inexhaustible, and one day in the not too distant future someone's going to realize that a letter addressed to Miss C. Flynn isn't going to be called for, and Miss Flynn's "suicide" is going to be remembered, and the letter is going to be opened.

And then the cat will be among the pigeons.

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One of Gerald Kersh's most unusual stories—which is saying a great deal. It was "a lucky day for the boar" . . .

TIME IS THE ILLUSION

by GERALD KERSH

WELL, WHAT THE DEVIL THEN, where's your title?" said Mr. Bozman, the proprietor of *The Baltimore General Press.* "I see a quotation: '*Ignoscito saepe alteri nunquam tibi*"—which, construed, reads 'Forgive others often, but never forgive yourself.' Well?"

His Editor, a timid man, murmured, "I advanced the gentleman five dollars."

"Gentleman? What the devil kind of alpaca-and-steel-mixture hack do you call gentleman? And what do you mean by five dollars? How dared you do it, sir? Silver is dug out of the ground; it does not grow on bushes. Eh? Eh?"

"We might entitle it *A Lucky Day for the Boar*, sir."

"You make free with my dollars, sir. Read it over to me, mister, if you will."

"By your leave," said the Editor, and read:

Self-sufficient, Colonel Hyrax came and went like a cat in the Duke's palace. Nobody could deny that there was, in fact, much of the feline in his fastidiousness and in his almost inhuman composure. As Chief of the Secret Police, Colonel Hyrax was not bound by the rules of protocol. Dread followed him, and awe—awe of the Unknown—and it was whispered that the Duke himself feared Colonel Hyrax.

Certainly, no one but he would have dared to detain the Duke when that potentate was booted and spurred for the hunt. Yet, although he was smiling with pleasurable anticipation as he listened to the baying of his boar hounds in the courtyard below, the Duke put aside his boar spear when Colonel Hyrax appeared, and, bidding him close the door, asked, "What now, Hyrax?"

"Your Grace, I have good news."

"My foresters have beaten out a black boar of thirty stone, a monster. So be brief. Good news of what?"

"Of the conspiracy, your Grace," said Colonel Hyrax.

"I suppose," said the Duke, with a harsh laugh, "I suppose you are going to tell me that my traitorous scoundrel of a nephew has named his partners in this plot against me?"

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"Precisely that, your Grace," said Colonel Hyrax, with a thin smile.

"No!"

"By your Grace's leave—yes," cried Colonel Hyrax. But he looked in vain for some demonstration of relief or joy. The Duke frowned.

"It is hard," he said, "it is very hard for me to believe. Are you sure, now? My nephew Stanislaus has named his friends?"

"Your Grace, I have a list of their names. They are under close arrest."

"Damn it! Stanislaus is of my blood. He had—I thought he had—something of my character. Red-hot pincers could not drag a betrayal of my friends out of *me*. Milksop!"

"Yet he conspired against the life of your Grace," said Colonel Hyrax.

"I know, I know; but that was all in the family. I trapped him, and he didn't lie about it. Naturally, he refused to name his collaborators. I'd have done the same in his place. Oh, yes, Hyrax—touching the matter of red-hot pincers—you never dared . . . ?"

"I know my duty, your Grace," said Colonel Hyrax. "I am well aware that your blood is inviolable, and that it is death to spill one drop of it; or to offer violence, however slight, to any member of your family; or even to threaten it. Neither may any of your Grace's blood be manacled. Oh, believe me, not only was his Excellency your nephew treated with the utmost gentleness—I saw to it, when he was placed in solitary confinement by your Grace's written order that he could not even do violence to his own person."

"And still he betrayed his comrades? He's no blood of mine!" The Duke then uttered foul accusations against his dead brother's wife. Growing calmer, he said, "More, Hyrax: tell me more." The horns sounded clear in the courtyard, but the Duke threw open a casement and roared, "Let the boar wait!"

"Your Grace sentenced your nephew to perpetual solitary confinement. His Excellency was to be 'left to cool his head,' to quote your own words."

"Did you starve him, Hyrax? You had no right to starve the boy."

"No, your Grace. He had everything of the best. The passage of Time did our work for us," said Colonel Hyrax.

"Time? What time? The young fool hasn't been locked up two months. What are you talking about?"

"If I may explain?" begged Colonel Hyrax; and, his master nodding, he continued, "I had prepared for his Excellency a commodious chamber, padded at walls, floor, and ceiling with heavy quiltings of lamb's wool covered with gray velvet. There was a double window, out of which his Excellency might look at the wild countryside surrounding the Fortress."

"Better than he deserved."

"His viands were, as I have said,

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of the best. But his meat was cut for him, and all his cutlery consisted of a horn spoon. For he was so violent, at first, that I feared the young gentleman might do himself a mischief."

"Aye, aye, he always was an overbred, nervous young fool. Well?"

"Then we asked his Excellency for permission to shave his head," said Colonel Hyrax. "He gave it."

"What the devil for?"

"Your Grace will see, presently. So, by his leave, we shaved off all his hair. We provided him with some quills, ink, and paper, but nothing edged or pointed. To calm him, a mild and harmless opiate was mixed with his Excellency's breakfast. He ate, and then, leaning on the casement, gazed moodily at the landscape under the morning sun. He dozed, leaning thus, for perhaps five minutes.

"When he opened his eyes he was looking upon a night scene with a rising moon, and the attendants were bringing his supper. His Excellency was bewildered. 'Am I bewitched?' he asked. But since, by your Grace's order, he was incommunicado, the attendants were silent."

"Bewildered?" cried the Duke, "So am I. From breakfast to supper—morning to moonrise—is a matter of hours. What was the purpose in bringing Stanislaus his supper five minutes after breakfast time?"

"Pray let me explain, your Grace. The prospect beyond his window was *not* open country. It was a blank wall, upon which I had caused to be projected through a lens, by means of a powerful reflector, highly realistic scenes painted upon glass by one of the finest landscape artists in Europe. Thus, I could create a perfect illusion of the various stages of the day, and even of the four seasons."

"But what for?"

"In order, your Grace, without violating your law, to let his Excellency confuse himself in his conception of *Time*. Soon he fell into a deep sleep, and an adroit barber shaved him and trimmed his nails. Men incarcerated can gauge Time, to a certain extent, by the rate of growth of their beards, you see. It was necessary to *bewilder;* it was necessary to let his Excellency *force himself* to have recourse to Reason, and to make his reasoning invalid. Do I make myself clear?"

"Go on."

"Hence, he would awaken—let us say—at midnight, look out of the window, see high noon; doze again, rise again in ten minutes, and—lo! and behold!—dawn. Or, awakening at dawn, he would see nothing but the rim of the setting sun, while the attendants came in with supper. Sleeping soon after, by the judicious administration of opiates, he would start up to observe another sunset.

"So, after a week, he asked how many months he had been there. There was no reply, of course."

"Clever, clever," said the Duke.

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Colonel Hyrax bowed, and continued, "Although the month was July, his Excellency awoke one morning to a scene of naked trees under a blanket of snow. Sometimes breakfast, dinner, and supper would arrive at intervals of only a few minutes after the clearing of the table. Or sometimes hours might elapse, after which his Excellency, starting out of a fitful sleep, might notice that it was early autumn now, where it had been midwinter when he last looked out.

"I took good care—since men in prison sometimes grow preternaturally observant—to age the guards and waiters, and to see to it that their uniforms showed increasing signs of wear. The chief warder was always accompanied by a pair of great dogs. At first, it was a couple of wolfhounds. I replaced these with older and older wolfhounds. Then there was a new young warder, and he had a pair of mastiffs—which, in their turn, I made appear to grow old, by a system of substitution.

"Naturally, I never entered the young gentleman's chamber myself. But I had my reports to rely upon. Your Grace, within a few weeks your nephew believed that he had been incarcerated for an incomputable number of years! Your Grace has had the nightmare, no doubt?"

The Duke said, "I have, and it's horrible. A second is an eternity, or worse. I think I understand you now, Hyrax. Go on."

"By means of concealed lamps there was always a diffused light in the chamber which, by the judicious use of hot-air pipes was maintained at a constant temperature of precisely seventy-four degrees fahrenheit.

"As his Excellency slept, his clothes were taken away and replaced by others, precisely the same in pattern, but just a little more worn. I also arranged that his clothes should be made progressively a hair's-breadth larger, so that the young gentleman grew gradually convinced that he was becoming shriveled and wasted with long imprisonment."

"Oh, clever, clever!" cried the Duke, with a slight shudder. "I think that, on the whole, given the choice, I'd choose the Iron Boot, the thumbscrew, or the rack. Proceed."

"Ah, but there is no question of *choice*, your Grace; for this method of mine depends for its effectiveness upon complete ignorance of the surrounding circumstances. Do I make myself clear?"

"Your object being, to plant a firm illusion that there has been a prolonged passage of time, when, as a matter of fact, only hours have elapsed," said the Duke.

"Just so," said Hyrax. "I have written a carefully annotated 'Procedure' for your Grace's perusal. I can make four minutes last forty-eight hours in the consciousness of the prisoner. I hasten to reassure

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your Grace that no common hand was laid on his Excellency, your nephew Stanislaus.

"His table was almost as well furnished as your Grace's own; only he had the delicacies of the season *out* of season. And allowing for certain inevitable margins of error, the young gentleman seemed to live a long month in half an hour. Between your Grace's breakfast and dinner, he passed approximately a whole year."

"Well," said the Duke, "that may teach the pup a lesson, not to plot against his poor old uncle who used to think the world of him. Well, come to the point. What made Stanislaus betray his friends? They are my enemies, it is true, but . . . well, I think the worse of him notwithstanding."

Colonel Hyrax said, "But his Excellency did not betray his friends, your Grace."

"Will you tell me what the devil you are talking about?" roared the Duke.

"I mean, he did not betray them wittingly."

"Oh? If you have deranged the rascal with your dirty drugs—" began the Duke.

"No, no, your Grace. The drugs were used discreetly, and sparingly, and then only for the first three weeks. Time, Time, Time is the illusion with which I took the liberty of bedazzling the young gentleman—Time as Man knows it, through the contemplation of mere external change.

"Men and fashions seemed to come and go. Once, on my order, a guard let fall a newspaper. It was postdated fifteen years: I had had one copy only printed before the type was broken up, and it was full of news of people and affairs his Excellency had never heard of."

"Most damnably clever!" exclaimed the Duke. "And my poor—I mean that wretched fellow who is supposed to be my brother's son, and couldn't even keep faith with his fellow-criminals: did he write nothing?"

"Only some verses, your Grace."

"About me?"

"About worms. But I see that your Grace is anxious to be after the boar, so I will conclude for now. After the young gentleman had been in that chamber forty days, the door was opened by a young officer in a strange uniform—gray, faced with yellow—and an older officer, in the same colors, but having a dolman trimmed with sable, came in, fell on his knees, and hailed your nephew as martyr, savior, and leader. The Duke, he said, was dead, the New Party was in power, and Stanislaus was to sit on your throne."

The Duke laughed. "Ha! And I suppose my nephew jumped for joy?"

"Not so, your Grace. He said—and I quote, so you will forgive me—he said, 'The old ruffian was kind to

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me once upon a time.' Then he said, 'And all my friends, I suppose, are dead, or old—which is worse.' "

"Aha!" cried the Duke, "We are coming to it, now!"

"Yes, your Grace. The Commanding Officer said, 'If you will tell me whom you mean, your Excellency, I shall immediately ascertain.' Whereupon, your nephew recited a list of forty names, which are on the paper which I have the honor to place in your Grace's hand."

"Hyrax," said the Duke, "you are *hellishly* clever! And my nephew —how is he?"

"I was listening to the proceedings at a concealed aperture, and did not see his Excellency at first. Then, when he came into my range of vision, I was astounded. For where, a few weeks before, I had seen a sanguine young man of twenty-four, I now beheld a decrepit and enfeebled man of sixty!"

The Duke was silent. Colonel Hyrax pointed to the paper upon which the names of the conspirators were written. "Your Grace will hang them?" he asked.

"No. I shall shock the wits out of them by pardoning them, and make forty friends into the bargain. Where's Stanislaus?"

"Asleep, your Grace," said Colonel Hyrax.

"You are an astonishingly clever man, Hyrax," said the Duke. "Did I not say that if you cleared this matter up I'd make a nobleman of you?"

"The work is its own reward, your Grace," said Hyrax.

"No, you have earned my gratitude. I hereby confer upon you the Barony of Opa, with all lands, rents, and revenues pertaining thereunto."

"Oh, your Grace! Words cannot express—"

"Save them, then. Leave me, now."

Hyrax having bowed himself out of his presence, the Duke called for his secretary. A soberly attired gentleman came in and made his obeisance. "Your Grace?"

"Colonel Hyrax is now Colonel the Baron Opa. Make a note of it."

"Yes, your Grace."

The Duke paced the floor, tugging at his beard. "And write me an order to the Lord Provost," he said. "Write as follows: 'Bearing in mind the new dignity of Colonel Hyrax, whom we have recently created Baron of Opa, you will procure a silk cord and hang him forthwith.' "

Scrawling his signature at the foot of this document, and impressing the warm wax with his great carnelian ring, the Duke muttered, "One could no longer sleep with such a man awake. He is too clever by half."

A nameless cold had crept into his heart. He looked long and anxiously at the morning sun, and listened with more than usual atten-

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tion to the portentous ticking of the great bronze clock.

Presently he said to his secretary. "Dismiss the men. I hunt no boar today."

"Yes, your Grace."

"I desire to see Stanislaus."

"Shall he be sent for?"

"No. I go to him."

The secretary, a good-hearted man, ventured to ask, "Oh, please, your Grace, is it your gracious intention magnanimously to pardon the unhappy young gentleman?"

The Duke growled, "No. My Grace's intention is humbly to beg the unlucky young gentleman, out of his magnanimity *to pardon me.*"

The proprietor said, "You gave this person five dollars, you say?"

"He asked for twenty," said the Editor. "I advanced him five."

"And what does the confounded author call himself?"

"Ethan Arthur Poland. Confidentially, I think he's the man who wrote *The Raven*—Edgar Allan Poe, no less."

"You throw my dollars about like rice at a wedding, my friend. Yes, you have my leave to print. Let the fellow have five dollars more, if he presses. A Latin title is a drug, sir, a drug. Take a title out of context," said Mr. Bozman, "out of context. And since I am paying for the job and writing it too, sign it Bozman—John Helliwell Bozman. Incidentally, you owe me five dollars."

So saying, the proprietor of *The Baltimore General Press* walked sedately out of doors.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

As a writer, Harry Kemelman long enjoyed an eager but relatively small audience of EQMM readers who admired the impeccable craftsmanship of the deductions of Professor Nicholas Welt. Then in 1964 he published FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE (now available as Crest d863, 50¢), received unanimous critical raves, won MWA's first-novel Edgar, and attained sales figures which meant he was reaching an audience much wider than that of mystery fiction. This is as it should be, for Rabbi David Small's first case was not only a fine detective story but also a rich, warm, humorous (and highly ecumenical) novel of the Jewish religion in faith and in practice. It's a pleasure to report that Rabbi Small's second case, SATURDAY THE RABBI WENT HUNGRY (Crown, $3.95), is even better, as a deductive puzzle, as a novel of religion, and in the integration of its two elements.

Read it in good health. (But Mr. Kemelman, please: some more Nicky Welt stories for EQMM? Or maybe a David Small short story?)

★★★★ **THE WIDOWMAKER, *by M. Fagyas*** (Crime Club, $3.95)

Fiction based on true mass poisonings in Hungary just after World War I; powerful, vivid evocation of place, time and society.

★★★★ **THE GALLANT, *by Charity Blackstock*** (Ballantine U2123, 50¢)

Arles in festival time offers picturesque background to quest for a possible new Landru, in a mystery-romance with Blackstock's astonishing firmness of narrative and character creation.

★★★★ **THE WRECK OF THE CASSANDRA, *by Frederic Prokosch*** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $4.95)

Noted poet-novelist employs his high skills in both fields to revitalize the suspense theme of the survivors on the tropical island.

★★★ **OFFSHORE!, *by Stephen Coulter*** (Morrow, $4.95)

Barratry and other parlous factors build terrifying suspense on an oil rig in the North Sea; unsubtle but impressive thriller, with encyclopedic knowledge of deep-sea oil-drilling.

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★★★ **IT'S COLD OUT THERE, *by Malcolm Braly*** (Gold Medal d1683, 50¢)

Braly knows how to use sex and violence legitimately and well, and adds an unusually penetrating study of the reactions of an ex-convict to the chill world outside.

Short story dept.: 14 of John D. MacDonald's skilful stories from slick magazines are gathered as END OF THE TIGER (Gold Medal d1690, 50¢), with a fine hard-headed introduction by the author. Many of them are criminous; but probably the best is the biting straight novella of the junior-executive ratrace, THE TRAP OF SOLID GOLD. . . . Agatha Christie's SURPRISE! SURPRISE! (Dell 8389, 50¢) was published in hard covers (1965) for juvenile readers; adults now discovering it will welcome an attractive sampler of 13 stories about Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple and others, from 7 different Christie collections, 1930-61.

★★★ **SABRE-TOOTH, *by Peter O'Donnell*** (Doubleday, $4.95)

The return of Modesty, fiction's most immodestly outrageous spy, in an even wilder and more entertaining tale than MODESTY BLAISE (1965; Crest R899, 60¢).

★★★ **THE SEVENTH, *by Richard Stark*** (Pocket Books 50244, 50¢)

Fine Hammett-Burnett tough objectivity in violent story of amateur hijacking of the loot from a brilliant professional caper.

★★★ **SOME AVENGER, RISE!, *by Lesley Egan*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)

Good detailed detection by lawyer Jesse Falkenstein exposes one of fiction's most elaborately intricate plots of revenge.

★★★ **THE FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS, *by Jean Potts*** (Scribner's, $3.95)

Adultery and murder in Manhattan, observed with sensitivity and a nice feeling for the relation of detection to character.

★★★ **THE CHRISTMAS EGG, *by Mary Kelly*** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95)

First U.S. publication of an early (1958) case for Chief Inspector Nightingale; colorful events, quietly and effectively told.

Reprint dept.: To follow the fine collection of shorter Dashiell Hammett, THE BIG KNOCKOVER (Random, $5.95), reviewed here last month, we now have new and attractive uniform editions (Dell, 50¢ each) and 3 Hammett novels: THE MALTESE FALCON (1930), THE GLASS KEY (1931) and THE THIN MAN (1934). Required reading, of course—or even re-reading.

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One of Detective Mitch Taylor's earliest homicide cases—perhaps his very first . . . another in Lawrence Treat's contemporary police procedurals which have the smack and feel and sound of real life . . .

B AS IN BLOODSTAIN

by LAWRENCE TREAT

IF EVER A HOMICIDE LOOKED routine, this was it. Except for one thing Detective Mitch Taylor could have wrapped it up in half an hour and gone back to his doodling in the Squad Room.

Except for one thing—the knife.

He was the first one to get there, he and his partner, Keenan. The pair of them went up in the newly painted self-service elevator, marched down the short corridor, and knocked on the door with the Sperber nameplate.

Keenan, a big man, long-nosed, with great, meaty paws. And Taylor, shorter, cocky, wearing a suit that cramped his shoulders; his brown eyes, lively and brimming with energy, gazed up from their long dark lashes.

They both loosened their coats and touched their holstered guns, just in case. They both drew back as the door opened, both flashed a sharp glance at the man who stood there, and then they both relaxed a little.

Sperber was built broad, with power, and he was young, but his eyes were bleary and dazed. He gulped and rubbed at his face.

Beyond him Mitch could see the empty bottle and the stale glasses, the dirty ashtrays, the overturned chair. Hangover, Mitch decided. Sperber had killed her while he was drunk, and now he could hardly remember why. The thing was to throw it right at him, before he started thinking his way out.

"Police," Mitch said. "Where is she?"

The guy blinked. His reactions were slow, from shock, and he stammered, "Th-there," without even pointing. Mitch shoved past him and walked back to the bedroom.

Dorothy Sperber was lying on the floor. She was still blonde and you could see she'd been pretty, and she was dressed in black lace underwear. The stab wounds had ripped it up plenty.

Mitch shuddered and closed his eyes. Sperber must have hated that underwear.

Keenan made some coffee.

Lieutenant Decker showed up next and began firing questions. All

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he could get, at first, was that Sperber was a bus driver and his wife's name was Dorothy.

After the coffee Sperber got hold of himself. He admitted he'd been having trouble with his wife. Sperber said it was his fault—he hadn't treated her right; but he claimed they'd made up and everything would have been fine.

They'd had a party last night to celebrate the reconciliation. Sperber said he didn't remember a thing from the time the guests left until he woke up with a hangover and a dead wife. So he called the cops.

The Lieutenant got a list of the guests. There were four of them, and a precinct team picked them up and had them at the apartment almost before the high brass and the experts arrived.

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant tried to get a confession. When he saw he wasn't getting anywhere, he told Mitch to look for the knife. Mitch couldn't find it, but he did come up with a button—a fancy green one that Sperber said had come off Marian Benton's dress last night. The button had bounced out of sight, and she'd been upset because nobody could locate it.

"Upset?" said the Lieutenant sharply.

"Just for a little while," said Sperber. "Then she forgot about it. We were all pretty high. We got to laughing. Dorothy, she was the life of the party."

"That why you got sore at her?"

"No," said Sperber uncomfortably. "You don't understand. She was cute. She had a way, kind of innocent." He shook all over and began falling apart again.

The first of last night's guests to be brought in were the Chuck Browns. They lived in the neighborhood. They'd left the party around one A.M. and gone straight home. It didn't look as if they could be involved in the murder.

Sperber's friend, Jack Pinney, arrived next. He was a tall lanky guy with sharp, dark eyes and hollow cheeks. Mitch took him into an empty apartment and found out he was a bus driver, too. But that was as far as Mitch got.

The door opened and a big healthy guy wearing a new suit strode in. He said, "Hello, Taylor. Get anything out of him?"

"Not yet," said Mitch. "I just—"

"That's okay," said Dickinson. "I'll handle him."

Mitch bristled. He'd tangled with Dickinson before, on other cases, and Mitch knew that the big guy would try to step all over him—and particularly with all this brass around.

"Look," said Mitch. "I only started—"

But he didn't finish the sentence. He was talking at Dickinson's back, and Dickinson's deep, confident voice drowned him out. Mitch edged over to the window, took out his pad, and made notes.

Pinney said that after the party

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he'd taken Marian Benton to the subway, then had a cup of coffee and gone on home. His parents had heard him come in a little before three in the morning. He'd called out to them and said he was tired and wanted to get to sleep.

The Deputy Inspector nodded at Mitch and told him to check with the restaurant and with Pinney's parents. Mitch maneuvered a couple of the boys into doing the legwork so that he could hang around while the Medical Examiner looked over the body. The M.E. placed the time of death somewhere between two and three in the morning, which meant Dorothy Sperber had been killed pretty soon after the party broke up.

After that the Medical Examiner went into a huddle with Dickinson and some of the Squad, and came up with the news that there'd been a lot of blood and that the killer must have got spattered with it. Dickinson made chalk marks on the floor, to show where the killer had stood.

Mitch wished he'd thought of making chalk marks, and then he spotted Keenan coming in with the clothes Pinney had been wearing last night. Mitch grabbed them and brought them over to the Deputy Inspector. He took them without glancing at Mitch and he examined them for bloodstains. There weren't any.

A couple of minutes later Mitch got his reports saying Pinney's story looked okay. So Pinney was released and told he could go to work.

When Mitch got back to the empty apartment, Dickinson was questioning Dorothy Sperber's girl friend, Marian Benton. For once Mitch was glad he wasn't carrying the ball, because you'd never impress anybody working on a dame like this. She just didn't react.

Mitch heard her flat, squeezed voice before he got a look at her face. He wanted to slap some life into her, but he knew it was a waste of energy.

She answered all the questions and corroborated all the stories, but she seemed dazed as she gave the information. That the Chuck Browns had gone home first, that Pinney had left with her, and that the Sperbers could hardly stand up at the end of the evening. She identified her missing button, and she wanted to get it back so she could sew it on and wear her dress. She kept saying in her dull, hopeless voice that it was the only decent dress she had, and she needed it.

She claimed she'd got home around two thirty A.M. and that her roommate had awakened and could vouch for the time. Dickinson kept Marian waiting while he checked her alibi and examined her dress. It had a button missing, and it didn't have any bloodstains. That cleared her, so Dickinson sent her home and told her to take the dress with her. But he stuck the button in a small envelope and kept it.

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With all the guests questioned and their actions accounted for, it looked as if everything was back where Mitch had lined it up four hours ago—either you had to get a confession, or else find the knife. Mitch saw that the next step was looking through the garbage pails downstairs, and he felt he'd be elected. So he elbowed his way out to the hall, where Dickinson couldn't order him around.

In front of the elevator Mitch went into two minutes of heavy thinking. The thing was, Dickinson was betting everything on Sperber's guilt, but Dickinson had to be wrong once in a while. So why not pick another angle and follow up on it?

Mitch told himself that Dorothy had been playing around. Sperber had said so. And if she'd been playing around with Pinney, then Pinney was in this right up to his neck. That would give Pinney a motive for killing her. As for the lack of bloodstains—well, let Dickinson worry about that.

Mitch began to like his theory.

He realized he might run into a little trouble with the Lieutenant, going off on his own like this. But if he stuck around, Dickinson would only make a sucker out of him. And tonight, when Mitch came home, he'd have to tell his wife he'd spent the day sorting garbage.

That settled it. Mitch ambled down the street, thinking maybe he'd hit on a bright idea. At the next drug store he turned in, entered a phone booth, and called his wife. Mostly to hear her voice.

"Hello, Amy?" he said.

"Hello, fella," she answered, speaking softly and yet with a lift that went right through him and perked him up. "How are you?"

"Fine. I got a homicide."

"Mitch!" she said, and the concern poured out of her. "Where are you?"

"I just left the place. It's routine."

"Well, I'm glad of that. Mitch, try to get home on time, will you? The Morrisons called and they have a new color TV set. They thought you might like to look at the fights tonight."

"Oh," he said. "Sure, I'll wind this up before dinner. All I got to do is find a knife, and then write out the report. I'll be home in plenty of time. What are you doing with yourself?"

"Sewing those curtains."

"Oh," he said. That meant pins all over. In the chairs, stuffed under the cushions—there wouldn't be a safe place to sit.

"Well," he said, "don't leave too many pins around. And Amy, what do you know about black underwear?"

"With lace?" she said excitedly. "Oh, Mitch!"

"I was just thinking," he said.

He hung up. Funny how a homicide could give you an idea what to get your wife for her next birthday. The trouble was, he'd feel

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a little embarassed buying it, unless he knew exactly where to go. Now if he could find out where Dorothy Sperber's had come from, for instance—

He went down to the bus garage to pick up a little gossip. He knew from experience that sometimes the cops were the last people in the world to get information. So he'd go to the source and listen.

When he got there, he could tell by the way they clammed up that they'd been talking about the homicide. He hung around, though, not asking questions, and after a while they began talking again.

They were sorry for Sperber. He was a right guy, they said. He and Pinney worked different shifts, and everybody knew where Pinney went while Sperber was driving his route. But that was what you got for marrying a flashy dame. With the plain ones, you didn't have to worry. But with somebody like Dorothy, you were asking for it.

Mitch listened and decided he really had something. He phoned the precinct and found out they were still looking for the knife, and that Sperber still couldn't remember anything.

Mitch said he was working on a lead, and he asked his partner, Joe Keenan, to meet him down at the garage with a squad car. Then Mitch went out for a late lunch.

When he got back Keenan was there.

"Well," said Keenan, "what happened to you? Dickinson wanted you to look for the knife."

"Garbage pails?" asked Mitch.

Keenan nodded, lifted his big meaty paws and smelled them with disgust. "Yeah," he said. "Garbage. What gives here?"

"We're waiting for Pinney," said Mitch. "He's out now, but he's due back around four. I figure we'll see what we can get out of him."

"The Lieutenant won't like this," said Keenan.

"That's tough," Mitch snapped. "But when a big sap like Dickinson—"

"Forget it," said Keenan. "He's out of your class. These homicide boys, they know their business."

"Look," said Mitch. "Whose side are you on, huh?"

"He worked it out with charts," said Keenan. "They none of them had time to go back and get other clothes, and they none of them had bloodstains. Dickinson, he figures Sperber must have been wearing pajamas, and then put them down the incinerator."

"Maybe some sneak thief got in the apartment," said Mitch, "and had to kill her to get away."

"The way her underwear's sliced up," said Keenan, "that's personal."

"Yeah," said Mitch. "Now where would you buy stuff like that?"

"How would I know?" said Keenan.

"You'd feel like a fool going in there and asking for it," said Mitch.

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"Explaining what you wanted." He frowned and thought about Amy. Then he and Keenan sat down and waited.

Pinney came back a little after four, spotted the cops, glared at them, and went into the washroom. Mitch got up and followed, but he didn't say anything. He just watched.

After a while it was too much for Pinney. He spun around and said, "Well? What do you want?"

"Where'd you put the knife?" asked Mitch.

"Knife? I didn't have a knife. I didn't have anything to do with it."

"We know you did," said Mitch. "We want that knife."

"You're nuts," said Pinney. But his voice was shaky.

After he'd changed his clothes, Mitch and Keenan walked up to him, one on each side.

"Come on," said Mitch.

Keenan drove the squad car and Mitch sat behind with Pinney.

"We know you were playing around with her," said Mitch. "We know all about it."

Pinney licked his lips. "I thought Sperber did it. You said so this morning."

"We got some more evidence," said Mitch. "We know better now."

"What evidence?"

"You'll see."

Keenan drove to the Sperber house, and in front of the door Mitch said to Pinney, "All right now. What I want is, you show us where you went when you left here last night. Which side of the street you walked on, what you saw, what you did. Everything, see?"

"We just walked," said Pinney. "Marian and me."

"You took her to the subway and then came back. You were seen."

"Nuts," said Pinney angrily. "Don't pull that. I didn't come back. I took Marian to the subway, like I said this morning. Then I had a cup of coffee. I told you where, and you checked, didn't you?"

"What did you talk to Marian about?"

"Not much. She wasn't feeling good, and I was afraid she'd get sick or something. I just wanted to get rid of her."

"Kiss her good night?" asked Mitch, to needle him.

"Me?" said Pinney. "That face?" He snorted sharply. "She didn't go for me, and I didn't go for her. Just because she was a friend of Dorothy's I had to be polite. So I took her to the subway and handed her a token."

"Yeah," said Mitch. That was the sort of thing that could be checked on; it was a wedge. He called to Keenan, "Let's go," he said. "Marian's."

But Mitch wasn't happy. Usually you kind of sense things. Except for professionals, most guilty people want to be caught; they do something dumb, they shove the evidence right at you, they can't help

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it. But Pinney, he was just mad. The only reason Mitch didn't give up was he could tell that Pinney didn't want to see Marian.

"You give Dorothy that black underwear, with the lace?" Mitch asked suddenly.

Pinney jerked up. "Oh," he said. "So that's why."

"Why what?"

"Why you think I had something to do with it."

"You bought it," said Mitch. He made the statement casually, as if he knew it for a fact.

Pinney closed his eyes for a couple of seconds. Then he shook his head as if to clear out the cobwebs.

"Where'd you buy the stuff?"

But Pinney wouldn't tell him. "Come on," Pinney said. "If I got to see Marian, let's get it over with."

She lived in one of those places where you rang a bell downstairs and then a buzzer sounded and you opened the door. There was no elevator, and Marian Benton's apartment was on the third floor. Mitch parked Pinney on the second, in Keenan's charge, and went up alone.

Marian looked bad. She was pale and splotchy to begin with, and she'd had a rough day, what with having her best friend murdered and then being questioned most of the morning. Apparently she'd just finished cleaning up. The two-room apartment looked scrubbed, and you could smell the soap and the wetness.

Mitch started off politely. "I'm Taylor," he said, showing his badge. "We got Pinney downstairs, and there's a few questions I'd like to ask you."

"Jack?" she said. "You mean—" She didn't finish the sentence, and Mitch didn't finish it for her. He waited a few seconds before tackling her from another angle.

"We been checking on what happened after the party," he said. "Tell me how he took you to the subway, what he said and all that."

She stared at Mitch in amazement. "He didn't take me to the subway," she said. "I went alone."

"But you said this morning—"

"I didn't," she interrupted. "Nobody asked me that. I wondered why, because I think he went right back. We went downstairs together, but he left me there, in front of the Sperber house."

Mitch walked to the door and opened it. "Hey, Joe," he called "Bring him up."

From the moment Pinney entered, Mitch could feel the atmosphere building up. He knew he had something, but he wasn't sure whether it was hooked up with the homicide. He studied Pinney, and then he turned to Marian and hoped something would happen.

Nothing did.

"Let's see the dress you wore last night," Mitch said to Marian.

"Of course," she said. "But I

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showed it before." She opened a closet and pulled out a green print. Mitch took it and held it up for Pinney to see.

"Is that where the button came off?" asked Mitch.

Pinney nodded. "Sure," he said.

Mitch was still fishing. He sat down in the easy chair. There was a pin stuck in the arm, and he wondered if there were more pins in the seat. Women that sewed, they were all alike, they all had the same habits. He put his hand down beneath the cushion and felt something. He knew what it was even before he held it up.

"Button!" he said. "The extra button!"

Marian ran at him and made a grab for it, but he got hold of her arm and twisted. She began screaming.

"Shut up," said Mitch.

She tried to slap him, and he ducked back. "You did it," he said. "You were carrying the torch for Sperber. That's what I missed out on."

"He didn't do it," she said hysterically. "He didn't—he *didn't!*"

"Sure, but *you* did. You knew you didn't have a chance to marry him while Dorothy was alive. And you figured if you could kill her and frame Pinney, Sperber would practically fall into your arms. But instead everybody thought Sperber had killed her, so you decided to do something. That's why you said Pinney left you in front of the house and went on back. You wanted to make a liar out of him and frame him."

"No!" she screamed. "No—no!" And then she broke.

Back at the precinct, after she'd confessed, Mitch went over it all with Lieutenant Decker.

"She bought two dresses," said Mitch. "Duplicates. The one she wore that had the stains and the button off, she hid that in the basement, where we found it along with the knife. The other dress, that was her alibi.

"What happened was, she had to tear a button off the second dress—to make the second one look like the first. But her roommate was around most of the day, so Marian didn't have a good chance. She ripped off the button and hid it in the chair. She had to do it fast, so the roommate wouldn't see. When me and Keenan came along before Marian could get rid of the second button, she was sunk. That button broke her alibi, and she cracked."

The Lieutenant nodded. "I figured it something like that, when Sperber wouldn't confess. But Taylor, what made you climb on her, huh?"

It was a dumb question, but Mitch was waiting for it. "The underwear," he said. "Only a jealous woman would rip it to shreds like that. The thing is, now

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we got to find out where it was bought."

When the Lieutenant nodded, Mitch sighed and stood up. He figured he'd had a pretty good day. He'd solved a homicide and put one over on Dickinson, and now he had the whole Police Department working on where he could buy Amy's next birthday present. And he'd be home for dinner and they'd get to the Morrisons' in time to see the fights.

He'd done all right.

But the thing that worried him was, what size did Amy wear? Some questions were tough—real tough.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Aldiss, Brian	WHO CAN REPLACE A MAN?	Harcourt, Brace	$4.50	9/14
Barr, Conrad Voss	THE SHEPHERD FILE	E. P. Dutton	3.95	9/19
Blake, Nicholas	THE MORNING AFTER DEATH	Harper & Row	4.95	9/28
Brean, Herbert	THE TRACES OF MERRILEE	Morrow	3.95	9/19
Christie, Agatha	AT BERTRAM'S HOTEL	Dodd, Mead	4.50	9/6
Creasey, John	THE INFERNO	Walker & Company	3.95	9/6
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Himes, Chester	RUN MAN RUN	G. P. Putnam's	4.95	9/9
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Roth, Holly	BUTTON, BUTTON	Harcourt, Brace	4.50	9/28
Shannon, Dell	WITH A VENGEANCE	Morrow	3.95	9/14
Westlake, Donald	THE SPY IN THE OINTMENT	Random House	3.95	9/29

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Eberhart, Mignon	WITH THIS RING	Popular Library	$ .60	9/20
Hurd, Florence	SECRET OF CANFIELD HOUSE	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	8/30
Queen, Ellery	ELLERY QUEEN'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL	Popular Library	.75	9/6
Rabe, Peter	THE SPY WHO WAS THREE FEET TALL	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	8/30

(Titles and data supplied by the publishers)

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Do you like on occasion to read a ghost story? We can hear you reply: yes, once in a while, but only if it's not too old-fashioned, if it's—well, out of the ordinary, unusual.

Of course every ghost story, by its very nature, is out of the ordinary; but accepting that as a natural (or should we say, supernatural) characteristic, a ghost story can be usual or unusual. Here is an unusual one—and you don't have to be a Scrabble player to enjoy it . . .

THE SCRABBLE CLUE

by JOHN PHILIP COHANE

THE YOUNG AMERICAN, PELLMAN BY NAME, WAS IN IRELAND SEARCHING for ghosts—active ghosts, passive ghosts, ghosts old or new. He was one of eight people staying near Mallow for the week-end with Brian O'Reilly.

In turn he buttonholed each of us and probed without success into our psychic experiences—until he came to Major Carberry, a fox-hunting neighbor who was present only for Saturday night dinner.

"Yes, indeed," declared the major as we rejoined the ladies in front of the drawing-room fire. "Something happened to me twelve years ago that was so inexplicable I've never since scoffed at any ghost story."

The major was the last person you'd expect to commune with the spirit world, so we urged him to tell his story.

"For many years my late wife and I had friends named Ellsworth who lived in a lonely house about three miles below Lahinch in County Clare. Shoalcroft it was called, and it was situated on a sharp cliff between some heavy woods and the edge of the Atlantic.

"In spite of its dilapidated condition, when the sun was shining the place was quite cheery. On a winter's night, however, with a storm howling in from the ocean, I can assure you it was spooky enough to keep you glancing over your shoulder every time you went up or down the stairs, or along one of the damp, badly lit corridors.

"We first met Ellsworth through his wife, an English girl named Edith Usher. She and my wife grew up together in Hampshire and she married Ellsworth about the same time my wife and I joined forces.

"We were living in those days near Carlow, quite a distance from Clare, but we managed to spend at least two week-ends each year with the Ellsworths and at regular intervals they visited us."

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The major stopped and turned to Brian O'Reilly. "I'm sorry, Brian. I almost forgot. I must be getting old. I'm going to need a Scrabble game to tell this story properly. Is there one in the house?"

"There should be." Our host rose to his feet. "We still play it now and then." He disappeared, returned a few minutes later with a Scrabble board under his arm. The major placed it on a table by his chair and continued his story.

"Back in the late forties when Scrabble first became popular, like many people the Ellsworths and ourselves took it up with a vengeance. But unlike most others we stayed with it, playing when the four of us were together; and my wife and I matched wits alone several times a week.

"The Ellsworths were doing the same and at each reunion we became more and more expert. Harry Ellsworth and I were fairly even and our wives about the same, so the competition was always close.

"After three or four years—in the autumn of 1951, it was—a frightful tragedy occurred. The Ellsworths were out fishing late one afternoon when a squall blew up. Their boat capsized. Edith was swept off by a current—that stretch of coast is extremely dangerous—and Harry Ellsworth barely managed to struggle ashore.

"Although lifeboats searched for many miles in both directions, Edith's body was never recovered. My wife and I attended services at Winchester Cathedral which isn't far from the Usher's family seat in Hampshire.

"After the funeral services we didn't see Ellsworth again, but three months later my wife read in the *Times* that he had remarried, a much younger girl from Canada—from Toronto, I believe.

"Frankly we weren't too surprised. While they tried to cover up in front of us, it had been apparent for some time that things weren't going too well between Edith and Harry. We had also heard vague rumors of another woman in London, but whether it was the one he later married or not I can't say."

The major paused while his glass was refilled. At the same time he shook the Scrabble letters face up onto the board, then resumed his story.

"Six or eight months passed. We weren't eager to continue our friendship with Ellsworth. Edith had been more our friend and three months seemed to be rushing things. Then one day he telephoned from Cork. He and his wife were en route to Dublin. Could we put them up for the night?

"Well, my wife naturally said yes. They arrived in time for dinner. The new wife turned out to be most charming and extremely pretty, so it ended with our accepting a week-end invitation in a month's time to Shoalcroft. We did, however, limit it to one night, explaining that we couldn't arrive

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until Saturday for lunch and had to be back in Carlow by Sunday evening.

"When we drove up the long sloping hill to Shoalcroft the sun was shining in all its splendor and I was delighted we'd come, especially when I saw the new Mrs. Ellsworth waving to us from the front door and looking as radiant as the weather.

"After lunch we went for a walk along the shore. The sky became overcast and by the time we returned to the house the feeling of the day had changed completely. Ellsworth apologized because they hadn't invited anyone else for dinner. Instead they were expecting six guests for Sunday lunch. This suited us perfectly as my wife was quite tired from the drive.

"'When we went upstairs to dress, rain was lashing against the window-panes and a wild gale was shrieking around the house and down our chimney.

" 'A dreadful night,' I said, peering into the darkness.

" 'Oh, dear!' exclaimed my wife. 'Do you know what day this is?'

" 'Saturday, September 27th, 1952,' I replied. 'So?'

" 'It was just a year ago today that poor Edith died.'

"That set us down a peg, but after a few cocktails my spirits revived. Only one thing depressed me. Ellsworth had been doing some hodgepodge renovating which somehow accentuated the sorry state of the rest of the house. What depressed me about this was I knew the repairs were being done with Edith's money. Ellsworth hadn't a bean until she died and we understood she left everything to him.

"After dinner I suggested a game of Scrabble but Ellsworth bowed out, explaining that Anita, his new wife, didn't play. I thought perhaps Scrabble might be a bit painful for him after all our games with Edith, so rather than try to teach Anita, my wife and I played two-handed while they started a game of chess.

"It was very cozy sitting by a roaring blaze—in spite of or because of the violent storm outside—but although my nerves are reasonably steady I had no desire to go exploring in the rambling wings of the house.

"Now," The major pulled his chair so that it faced the table beside him. "I don't know how many of you have played Scrabble, so I'll keep this simple." We all crowded around the table.

"Each person starts with seven letters picked at random from the pile. The object is to construct as long words as possible with those letters. You build in turn on the previous words, replacing the letters you've used so that you're always playing with seven letters.

"I'll never forget the words that night. My wife began with the word GUMMY." The major placed these letters horizontally in the middle of the board but to the left so the G hit a double-letter score.

"Then I came down vertically into the Y of GUMMY with the word

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NOBODY. My wife added all seven of her letters to the B in NOBODY to form the word BISECTOR."

With each word the major placed the correct letters on the board.

"Now in Scrabble when you use all seven letters you receive a bonus of 50 points. My wife was delighted with her success, but I came right back with all seven of my letters, forming the word DIRECTLY, using the C of BISECTOR.

"Well, of course, we were then both delighted, but to our astonishment my wife followed with a third 50-bonus score, building the word BLUNDERS down through the U of GUMMY.

" 'What do you think of that?' I called out to Ellsworth. 'Three seven-letter words in a row!' "

"He got up and came across to our table, peered over my shoulder at the letters in front of me.

" 'Why, by George!' he exclaimed. 'I believe you have another—a fourth!'

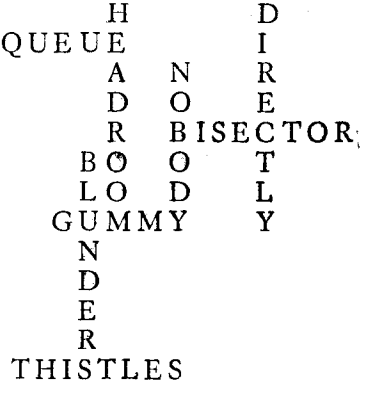
" 'Don't show him,' protested my wife. 'He has to find it himself.'

"It didn't take long—in fact, it was quite simple. Using the S of BLUNDERS and my seven letters I formed the word THISTLES.

" 'It's not possible!' said my wife and I thought she was referring to my last word. Instead she was putting down her seven letters to make HEADROOM with the first M of GUMMY as the last letter.

"This meant we had used all seven letters five times running. I tried to make it six in a row but the best I could do was QUEUE, building into the E of HEADROOM.

"At that point"—the major rapidly added more letters—"the board looked like this:"



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"We were both bursting with excitement and Ellsworth seemed as carried away as we were.

" 'I've never seen anything like it!' he said. 'It's splendid. Really splendid. At this rate the Carberrys will be champions of the world. I must teach you how to play, Anita.'

" 'It looks like great fun,' she said, although I don't believe she really understood what was going on.

"At that moment, with no advance warning, the hair began to rise on the back of my neck. A wave of terror swept through me unlike anything I had ever felt in my life.

"I suddenly knew there weren't four of us together in that room. There was a fifth person, standing alongside me, and I knew right away who it was. It was Edith Ellsworth.

"Not only was she standing there, she was trying desperately to tell me something. By then I was soaked with perspiration. I looked across at my wife, but she was busily selecting her next letters. Obviously she had felt nothing.

"Ellsworth, however, shivered and said, 'There must be a window open somewhere.' He walked over and shut the door leading to the dining room.

"As he started back towards us the scales fell from my eyes. Edith's message came through to me and almost overwhelmed me in its clarity. I thought I was going to keel over.

" 'I don't feel well,' I said to my wife. 'Let's finish this in the morning.'

" 'Oh dear,' she sighed. 'I knew you shouldn't have so much brandy. On top of everything else.' She had seen nothing. My main worry was Ellsworth. But if he knew what was happening he certainly didn't show it.

"We put the Scrabble game on an old chest of drawers and midst regrets went up to our room. Once we were alone I turned to my wife. 'Do you believe in ghosts?' I asked.

" 'I don't know.' She looked startled. 'I've never thought about it. Not since I was a child. Why? Did you see one tonight?'

" 'Not exactly.' I checked to be certain our door was tightly closed. 'There was a message from Edith. It was on the Scrabble board.'

" 'On the Scrabble board? You're not serious?' My wife looked as though *she* had seen a ghost.

" 'I wish to God we'd brought our own set,' I said. 'But let's wait half an hour till they've retired. Then I'll slip down and bring the board up here. If I bump into Ellsworth I'll tell him we decided to finish the game in bed.'

"We waited for almost an hour, then I opened our door. There was a light in the hall but no one seemed to be stirring. I tiptoed down the stairs,

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found the unfinished game still on the chest of drawers and brought it back to our room.

"I placed it carefully on the double bed. 'Take another look,' I told my wife.

"After several minutes she shook her head. 'It's Greek to me.' "

The major stopped and glanced slowly around at our group. "Do any of you see the message?" he asked.

We studied the board for a moment unsuccessfully and then the major explained. "In six of the words there was another word hidden, and one word was complete in itself. Taking them in the order they were put down on the board, there was *my* in GUMMY. *Body* in NOBODY. *Is* in BISECTOR. *Directly*, complete in itself. *Under* in BLUNDERS. *This* in THISTLES. *Room* in HEADROOM . . . *My body is directly under this room.*"

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Brian O'Reilly. "But what about the word QUEUE?"

"Oddly enough," said the major. "I got that first. The letters EUE suddenly jumped out at me as though they were written in flame. EUE. Her initials. Edith Usher Ellsworth. As far as I know they don't appear in that sequence in any other word in the English language."

"My gosh!" said Pellman who was quickly jotting down the words on the board in a notebook. "What did you do?"

"I slipped downstairs again and put the game back on the chest of drawers. The next morning we slept late. By the time we had finished breakfast, guests were arriving for lunch. I did, however, see that the Scrabble game was resting undisturbed in the same place as before.

"All the way home to Carlow three questions kept turning over in my mind. Had Ellsworth also discovered the message from his dead wife? If so, would he realize that I had discovered it? And if the answer to these two questions was yes, would he remove Edith's body from the cellar under the drawing room? For I was absolutely convinced she was buried there.

"During the next few days I did nothing but worry about what I should do. Finally I stopped in to see an old friend, John Curran, the Gardai Sergeant in Carlow. I told him the whole story, using a Scrabble board as I did tonight.

"Thank heavens for the Irish imagination! In some countries they'd have given me a mental examination. But not John Curran, who also happened to be a Scrabble player.

"He decided it would be better to wait until the Ellsworths were away before exploring the basement, but he did drive down immediately to talk to the Gardai Sergeant in Lahinch. Four days later he telephoned me during dinner.

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" 'I'm back in Lahinch,' he explained. 'Our friends are attending the Arc de Triomphe race in Paris. They won't be home until Monday afternoon. We're searching tonight. I'll call you in the morning.'

"I couldn't sleep all night. The telephone rang at 7:30. It was John again. 'We're on the right track,' he said. 'Someone's been digging in the dirt floor of the basement. With a new wife around he can't have moved the first one very far. We're going ahead, figuring you're right. If we're wrong we'll catch hell but there you are.'

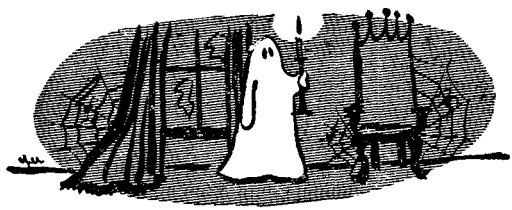
"They weren't wrong," added the major, gracefully accepting his third nightcap. "In the early afternoon they found poor Edith. Ellsworth had reburied her underneath a tool shed behind the house. She had, of course, never been near the ocean. Her skull had been bashed in with a heavy object."

"What happened to Ellsworth?" asked Pellman, who looked as though he had struck oil in the west of Ireland.

"He committed suicide." The major spoke without regret.

"On Monday afternoon they arrested him as he stepped off the plane at Shannon Airport. He asked if he could stop in the gents for a minute and with three men waiting outside he took a dose of potassium cyanide. He must have been worried that I had seen the message.

"I felt sorry for his new wife. She was a darling. Still, think what Ellsworth might have done to her! Her family owned extensive mining properties in Canada. And don't forget. Unlike Edith she couldn't have communicated—at least, she didn't know how to play Scrabble."



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM O'FARRELL**

TITLE: ***With Blue Ribbons On It***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: California

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *For twenty years Oliver and Janice Morgan had lived together, and for the past nineteen of those years they had thoroughly disliked each other . . .*

"THE SEDAN," MR. MORGAN SAID, "is two years old. It's time to trade it in."

Mrs. Morgan frowned. "The station wagon's nine years older. Why not get rid of it?"

"As a second car, the wagon's good enough."

"It's always flooding. When it does I have to wait twenty minutes before I can make it start."

"So wait. You haven't anything else to do," he said.

They were at breakfast in their small but beautifully situated home in Southern California. Through the window they could have seen the ocean several hundred yards away and several hundred feet below. It was calm and blue this morning, and far out at sea white cumulus clouds drifted like fat airborne pillows, but neither of them knew this because neither of them looked.

Oliver Morgan was 52 years old, his wife was 49. He was an attorney who many years before had conceived the idea that a good lawyer is one who keeps his mouth shut unless it is to his advantage to open it. As a result, his lips had compressed to a grim slit which did not seem incongruous with the rest of his thin predatory face.

Janice Morgan was his exact opposite in appearance. She topped him by three inches and her heavy body was broad in proportion to her height. Her hair, having gone through a succession of color changes, had fixed on a permanent

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pinkish red, and she had pale blue eyes which, when she looked at Oliver without his knowledge, assumed a gelid quality similar to the sheen of an iceberg.

For twenty years these two had lived together, and for the past nineteen of those years they had thoroughly disliked each other. But they had never quarreled. Their mutual antipathy was too deep to be expressed in words.

"It's late," Oliver said, rising from the table. "If you'll give me the keys to the car I'll run along."

She picked up a fork and put it down again. "To the sedan? I need it, Oliver. I'm playing bridge this afternoon."

"Take the station wagon. You don't expect me to drive that wreck on the freeway two days in succession, do you?"

"Drive it as far as you can, then take a cab."

"I put it to you," Oliver said in his best courtroom manner, "that you're as capable of telephoning for a cab as I am."

"Perhaps," she said, "but this is a rather special party. You certainly don't want me to arrive at Mrs. Jamison's in a taxi."

All this in polite tones of reasonability, but Oliver knew when he was licked. He went to the garage and tried to start the station wagon. Twenty-one minutes later the motor caught and he was able to back it to the street.

Driving along the Beach Road he hummed, *Put on Your Old Gray Bonnet,* as was his custom when preoccupied, and reflected on the countless small frustrations which, added together, made up the overall state of nullification that was his life. It seemed to him that they all centered about the continual bickering as to who at what time was to drive which car.

He told himself that he had no objection to Janice taking it on—to her—an important occasion such as a meeting of the Women's Club; but it was ridiculous that he should be inconvenienced for no better reason than that she wanted to see a movie or play bridge.

Yet this was happening with growing frequency. The station wagon had stalled on the freeway a week before, and the memory of impatient horns and the monologue of a traffic cop had been a source of acute embarrassment to him.

And so tomorrow—if he was lucky enough to get hold of the sedan—he would trade it in on a new one. And what would happen? The situation would get worse. Janice would come up with a dozen new chivvying reasons why it was absolutely necessary that she take the new car. And once in possession she would manage to mislay the keys; she would insist that something was wrong with the motor and that it must be taken to the garage; she would do literally anything rather than give it up.

"Put on your old gray bonnet,"

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Oliver whistled, *"with the blue ribbons on it, and we'll hitch Old Dobbin to the shay . . ."*

Miss Swanson, his secretary, gave him a subdued, "Good morning," when at last he reached the office. She was a mediocre typist and had difficulty reading her own shorthand, but she was decorative and very much afraid of him. These last two qualities made up for what she lacked professionally.

Oliver worked all day and left for home at five o'clock. He went to bed at the usual time but the next morning he got up early, tiptoed into his wife's bedroom, and took the sedan's keys from the dressing table without awakening her. He left the house and had breakfast at a drug store on his way to work.

At one o'clock that afternoon he entered the showroom of the agency at which he'd bought the sedan and told an extremely British salesman that he wanted a new model, same color, same make, and same extras—and could he pick it up that evening and drive it home?

The Englishman's expression was a nice blend of sympathy and condescension. "Impossible, Mr. Morgan. Takes three weeks to get delivery."

"What's the matter with this one?" Oliver indicated the sedan beside which they were standing. It was in every way the car he had described.

"Sold, I'm afraid. The gentleman who bought it will be back in town next week."

"Oh, come now." Oliver summoned up what he believed to be a winning smile. "A small favor for an old customer? Why don't you ask the sales manager?"

The salesman shrugged. "I'll ask him," he said.

He disappeared and Oliver turned idly to inspect the other merchandise. The display consisted, besides the car he wanted, of another sedan and two convertibles. There was also—and a vague excitement stirred him the instant he saw it—a low-cut, light gray sports job with a black leather top, two bucket seats, and a hood which, by its length, must have housed enough power to propel a ship. It glittered with chromium and its sweeping lines made it appear to be eager for the road, on the verge of flying through the window and away.

The French have a saying, "In a certain corner of the heart one is always young." Oliver, looking at the sports car—it was a Raleigh Minim of British manufacture—felt that certain corner swell and burst. Its contents flowed out, took over.

He approached the car tentatively, opened the door, slid behind the wheel. He fit. The bucket seat was precisely wide enough to accommodate his posterior and not one inch wider. A wild thought flashed into his mind and slowly

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the corners of his thin lips twisted up into a grin. He shut the door and took a firm grip on the wheel.

The salesman's voice recalled him to reality. "A sweetheart, isn't she? Extremely popular at home—I mean in England. Twin carburetors, forty miles to a gallon, and she cruises at seventy an hour."

"Cylinders?"

"Eight." The salesman walked around the car and started to raise the hood. "I'll lift the bonnet—"

"The what?"

"Sorry. Meant the hood, of course." He heaved it up, and Oliver climbed out to look.

He was no mechanic, but the motor was impressive. He poked his finger at one of the two carburetors. *"Put on your old gray bonnet,"* he sang dreamily.

The salesman gave him a startled sidewise glance. "Beg pardon?"

"How much?"

"A year's unconditional guarantee goes with it—"

"How much?" Oliver repeated.

The salesman told him. "About the sedan in which you're interested—"

"I'm no longer interested," Oliver said.

Driving the Raleigh Minim, Oliver arrived home shortly before sunset. He parked in the driveway and pressed the horn, which emitted an unmistakably foreign *bleep-bleep*. The door opened and Janice appeared, coming to an abrupt stop when she saw the sports job. Her eyes gleamed covetously. She came forward and stroked the glossy paint.

"Is this *it?*"

"This is it."

"It's ducky. Simply ducky. What a cunning leather top! Oliver, may I drive it? Just around the block?"

He got out and gallantly held the door. "Help yourself." He suppressed an anticipatory smile.

Janice started out with breezy confidence. She swung her right leg inboard and eased down on the seat. Then she looked puzzled. Her bewilderment grew when she tried to get her head in. She finally accomplished it, but only by bending her neck painfully, and when she tried to pull her left leg in she couldn't do it. It wouldn't clear the door.

She sat for half a minute in this uncomfortable bifurcated position while her complexion changed from pink and white to angry red. Then slowly she climbed out.

"Can't you make it, dear?" Oliver said sympathetically. "Too bad. Next summer when the top's off, I'll run the car up close to the garage and lower you into it from the roof."

"You horrible man!" Janice said. "You incredibly selfish horrible little man!"

Oliver was shocked. He'd always known what she really thought of him, but hitherto she'd had enough good taste to keep her opinion to herself.

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"Must you be so vulgar, dear?" he asked.

She could. She was. The dam of silence had been breached, and it never was shored up again. From then on she said exactly what she thought when she thought it, and she thought continuously. Oliver could even hear her muttering imprecations in her sleep.

She gave him no rest at home, and fell into the habit of telephoning him at the office several times a day. She pulled her sister, Martha, into the act. Every other evening when he got home, Martha would be there, glaring at him like the middle-aged and disappointed virgin that she was; and once her mother called long distance to read him a newspaper account of what a judge had said and done to a man who beat his wife.

Oliver got jittery. He took it out on Miss Swanson and finally fired her, and Miss Swanson had to put in a labor claim to get the two weeks' salary she had coming.

He lost his appetite. In three months his normal 140 pounds shrank to a stringy 125. Clients tired of his unpredictable moods and found other attorneys to represent them. Had he specialized in crime or divorce his practice would not have been so drastically affected —in Southern California the demand for such specialists exceeds the supply; but Oliver had started as a corporation lawyer. It began to look as though he would finish as one, soon.

The blowup came a little after three o'clock one rainy afternoon in February. On Saturdays, Oliver kept office hours only in the morning. Having exhausted all time-killing possibilities, he came home about 1:30. A strange car was parked in front of the house. The station wagon was in the driveway, and he passed it to park in the garage.

He heard the front door open and shut as he climbed out of the car, and he looked back toward the street in time to see a young man with a brief case hurry down the walk, get into the strange car, and drive away. A salesman, he thought, and wondered what useless frill Janice had bought now.

From inside the garage a door opened into the kitchen, and he used it rather than walk through the rain to the front door. He heard voices as he entered the house and assumed that, as usual, Martha was visiting her sister; but when he went into the living room he saw that Janice was alone. She was watching television—one of those women's programs he particularly despised.

She looked up, hearing his footsteps, and quickly turned back to the screen again.

"Who was the man just left here?" Oliver asked above the babble.

"A lawyer," Janice said.

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Oliver hung his raincoat in the closet, thoughtfully sat down, and pretended to read a magazine.

The TV prattled on. At two o'clock, when he might reasonably have expected her to turn it off, Janice changed it to another program more inane than the one that had preceded it. Oliver saw that no more information would be forthcoming unless he pried it loose.

"I'm a lawyer," he said. "Why not keep the business in the family? Why should you need a lawyer, anyway?"

"I'm getting a divorce," she said.

"An excellent idea." He took the magazine into his bedroom, shut the door. Instantly the sound swelled loud enough to blast his eardrums even through the wall. Janice couldn't possibly enjoy it; she was doing it for the sole purpose of making him uncomfortable. And she was succeeding.

Elation, which had been his first reaction to her announcement, faded; he began to speculate about a number of unpleasant angles a divorce suit might involve. Chief among these was the division of community property; he was afraid that his ideas and Janice's would differ radically.

At 2:30 she switched channels again, to raucous jazz this time, and at 3:00 she shifted over to, of all things, a children's program entitled Captain Alligator.

Oliver threw the magazine on the bed and went into the living room. Janice wasn't watching the screen; she was standing at the window. He walked over to the set and flicked it off.

She turned calmly. "Thank you, Oliver. Switching off the TV when I want to listen constitutes mental cruelty. Add that to infidelity and my suit's as good as won."

Oliver wasn't sure that he had heard correctly. "Infidelity? With whom?"

"Miss Swanson, naturally. Were there others?"

"Perjury, Janice? I'm ashamed of you. You know very well—"

She smiled. "I know, and so does Miss Swanson. But we'll both testify to that effect. Miss Swanson will do it because you treated her abominably, and also because I've promised her a small percentage of the settlement."

"There'll be no settlement!"

"Oh, yes, there will. And it will be a juicy one after the judge has heard my story. I'll take the house, of course, and at least half of everything else." Her smile grew broader. "But never mind, dear. I'll let you have the sports car. Satisfied?"

Oliver was facing her from the fireplace. Beside the fireplace in an iron stand were a small shovel, a poker, and a pair of tongs. He didn't remember reaching for the poker, but the next thing he knew it was in his hand and Janice was lying on the floor.

She lay on her back; only the whites of her eyes were visible, and

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her face was masked with blood from multiple head wounds.

Oliver dropped the poker and felt her pulse. Her wrist was as limp and lifeless as foam rubber. He staggered to a chair, fell into it, and wondered what on earth he was going to do.

Gradually, like slow motion photography of the growth and budding of a flower, a plan unfolded in his mind. He tested it and found it good. The station wagon would have to be sacrificed, but the car was insured and, anyway, he no longer needed it. As soon as it was dark, in about three hours, he would carry what was left of Janice to a lonely canyon, arrange her realistically behind the steering wheel, and push the station wagon off the side.

The clock ticked loudly on the mantel. The time was 3:20. Rain beat against the picture window. Oliver hummed quietly, staring at the rain.

At four o'clock he washed the poker thoroughly, returned it to its stand. He also cleaned the floor and placed an absorbent bath towel under Janice's head.

At 5:15 the light began to fade.

At 5:30, on the dot, the ringing telephone brought him trembling to his feet.

He would have to answer it. Later it might help establish that he had not left the house since coming home early that afternoon. He lifted the receiver.

"Yes?"

A voice he recognized as Martha's asked querulously for Janice. He told her Janice wasn't in.

"Well, where is she?"

"She went to the market. Any message?"

"This is Martha. I'm coming out your way. Tell her I'll drop in."

Oliver's hand, grasping the telephone, grew wet with perspiration. "I wouldn't do that, Martha. The weather's bad. It's practically a cloudburst."

She broke the connection without bothering to answer. Oliver slowly hung up, too. The backs of his knees were watery, and he stood for a moment listening to the erratic beating of his heart. Then frantically he went to work.

Janice's raincoat was in the closet, and he bent her stiffening arms to get it on. He found a white scarf in her bedroom and wound it around her head. Death seemed to have multiplied her weight by two, but he dragged her across the living room, through the kitchen, and into the garage.

Then he had to go back into the house to get her shoes which had brushed off in transit. While there, he put on his own coat and hat.

Returning to the garage, he peered through rain at the station wagon in the driveway. Low clouds obscured it and this was in his favor; what the clouds didn't hide, the walls of the garden would.

He ran out, opened the car's

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door, went back to the garage, picked up the body in a fireman's lift. It was as heavy as a log of the same size, and the arms and legs protruded like stiff branches; but he carried it to the station wagon and stuffed it inside. He climbed behind the wheel, turned on the ignition, and pressed the starter.

A moist and whirring chuckle answered, and he smelled the greasy odor of gasoline. The carburetor was flooded. It would be all of twenty minutes before the car would start.

He couldn't wait that long. Martha might arrive at any moment. There was only one thing to do.

He got out, pulled the body free, and carried it back to the garage. But when he tried to cram it inside the Raleigh Minim, he experienced the same difficulty Janice had come up against. She didn't fit. As he had facetiously suggested to her, she would have to be lowered into the tiny sports car. That meant the top must be removed.

He detached the top, laid it on the floor, picked up Janice, and forced her down into the seat. She was quite stiff now; bending her knees to the proper angle was a project in itself. But he did it and then, when he had her kneecaps scrounged up to her chin, the top had to be screwed back in place again.

All this took time. It was after 6:00 before he was ready to leave. And backing out of the garage, he knew that his previous plan would have to be abandoned. It had been hard enough to wedge Janice into her present seat. Putting her behind the wheel, as she must be placed if his prepared story were to be given credence, would be impossible.

The body would have to be abandoned in a spot consistent with another story that came to him as readily as had the first one. He backed the Raleigh to the street and drove toward the Beach Road.

". . . through the fields of clover, we will roam all over . . ." Oliver whistled thoughtfully as he tooled the sports car through the rain.

He turned left at the junction and headed for a canyon which, cutting through the mountains, had its far end in a densely populated valley ten miles inland. He passed the fishing pier and a neon-lighted restaurant, and then a lonely stretch of rock-strewn, ocean-pounded sand.

Two hundred yards ahead was a line of houses propped on piles above the sea. It was on this stretch that he had decided to leave Janice, but it was still too early. Trucks roared by and passenger cars went scooting past. He continued south toward the canyon, turned into it, and drove all the way to the valley before returning to the beach.

When next he approached the lonely stretch, the traffic had considerably lessened. Clouds hid the moon and the only illumination

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came from his own headlights. He switched them off, made a U-turn, and parked beside a steep bank that led down to the sea.

Slowly his eyes became accustomed to the darkness and he was able to make out a large boulder halfway between him and the houses. Hidden behind it, Janice would probably remain undiscovered until morning. The boulder was only about fifty yards away.

Planning the operation, he found that it divided itself neatly into two parts, the first of which would have to be performed at utmost speed. Whisk off the car's top, haul Janice out, shove her down the bank, and jump down after her. From then on he would be able to proceed at a more leisurely pace.

Working from inside the car, he loosened the top. Then, when everything was ready, when an interval came when there were no approaching headlights, he leaped out into the rain.

The top peeled off. He dropped it beside the car. He opened the door, put one arm around Janice and both hands beneath her arms. He pulled. She stuck. *Rigor mortis* had set in and she could not be budged. Jackknifed at the hips and knees, the only way to get her out would be to sort of roll her forward and to the right.

He did this, and fortunately no car appeared until she was lying on the road. He shoved her from the bank just before a passing oil truck deluged him with puddled rain. Then he also scrambled down the bank and lugged her to the boulder.

He tucked her up against it on the seaward side, and was about to leave when he heard the excited barking of a dog nearby.

His head jerked up. Not thirty yards away he saw a raincoated couple who, hand in hand, were apparently oblivious of the weather. They were giving their pet its evening walk; and the dog, straining at its leash, was barking furiously.

Oliver ran, but even in his panic he was careful to keep the boulder between the couple and himself. He climbed the bank, threw the top into the car, slid behind the wheel, and started the motor. Not until then did he look back at the beach.

He drew a deep breath of relief. The couple had safely passed the spot where Janice was concealed.

Safely? As he watched, the dog slipped its leash and dashed back toward the body. It stood six feet from the boulder and sounded the alarm.

"Here, Mike! Here, boy!" its master called.

The dog continued barking. The man and woman conferred inaudibly, then started back. Oliver swung the Raleigh Minim into another U-turn.

". . . on our Golden Wedding

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day," he hummed nervously, racing home as fast as he could go.

He roared into the garage and, without stopping to replace the top, found Janice's handbag in her bedroom, removed a small roll of bills, and put the money in his pocket.

The remaining contents of the bag he left undisturbed.

Carrying it, he returned hurriedly to the station wagon, got in, and pushed the starter button. This time the motor caught and he backed out of the drive.

Lights were moving on the beach when he arrived at the spot where he had stopped before, and a Highway Patrol car had parked on the road directly in line with the boulder. Oliver wasted no time. He threw Janice's bag and the ignition keys out the window, left the station wagon, and went home on foot. It took him half an hour and he was exhausted when he got there, but he did not stop to rest.

He put the top back on the sports car and screwed it into place. Then he went into the house, burned the towel on which Janice's head had rested, and changed into dry clothes.

At 8:30, exactly, three hours from the time the phone call had triggered him into action, he was at last able to sit down.

Instantly the telephone rang again, and again it was Martha.

"Put Janice on the line."

"She's not here."

"Not there! Where is she?"

"Went to a movie."

"You said—"

"I know what I said," he broke in querulously. "I said she'd gone to the market. She did. She telephoned from there that she was going to see this movie. It's over in the valley."

"In the valley!" Martha had an exasperating habit of repeating the simplest statements. "You let her drive to the valley on a night like *this?*"

"Am I expected to set up roadblocks? I'm her husband, not her boss."

"Well, Mr. Smarty-pants, you won't be her husband very long."

"So I've been informed," he said. "If you want to leave a message, leave it. If not, hang up."

Martha snorted. "You've got your comeuppance coming, Mr. High-and-Mighty. I'll be glad to see you get it."

"Message?"

"Tell Janice I won't be coming over. The rain's too bad."

"A pity you couldn't have told me that three hours ago," he barked into a phone that had suddenly gone dead. He slammed the instrument into its cradle and sat down.

The clock ticked, rain spattered against the window. At ten o'clock he made a cup of instant coffee. At elevan he changed to pajamas, slippers, and a dressing gown. Shortly before midnight he looked up the

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number of the Valley Theatre, and dialed it.

"What are you playing tonight?" he asked.

"We *were* showing a rerun of *Psycho,*" a man yawned. "Last show let out half an hour ago. Bill changes tomorrow. We—"

"Thank you." Oliver hung up.

Then came the last of his chores —the only one he feared. It wasn't necessary for him to simulate nervousness. His hand shook as he dialed 116 and asked the emergency operator to connect him with the Sheriff.

The phone buzzed and a man said gruffly, "Sheriff's office." Oliver cleared his throat.

"This is Mr. Morgan, Oliver Morgan. I'm worried about my wife. Early this evening she drove to the valley to see a picture. She hasn't come home and in this rain —"

The gruff voice grew reassuring. "Well, Mr. Morgan, you just take it easy. No accidents have been reported in the canyon. Lots of things could have happened; maybe she had a flat."

"You don't know Janice. If she'd had a flat she'd have telephoned me to come and fix it. I'm afraid—"

He was interrupted. "Did you say Janice? Janice Morgan?"

"Yes."

"Hold the line." The voice had changed again; it was businesslike. Oliver heard the man muttering to someone. Then he was back again.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Lieutenant Wylie's on his way to see you. He should be there now."

"Why? What's happened?"

"Lieutenant Wylie will tell you. I think you'd better wait."

Oliver smiled briefly as he broke the connection. The wheels were rolling in the right direction. All he had to do was let them roll. And go over his story, talking himself into the role that he must play.

Let's see. First, this Lieutenant Wylie would break the news about the murder. Then would come a sympathetic recital of the facts. The finding of Janice's body and the subsequent investigation by the police. That investigation could have led to only one logical conclusion: that Janice had picked up a hitchhiker who had stolen her money, killed her, driven the station wagon to the beach, and hidden her behind the boulder. He had then abandoned the car and either walked away or bummed another ride.

The story was entirely credible, and Martha, unwillingly no doubt, would testify that she had called the house twice and that he'd answered the phone on both occasions. A man can't be talking on the telephone and at the same time be out in a rainstorm beating his wife over the head.

Oliver chuckled. He went into the dark kitchen and looked out the

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window at the driveway. He got to the window just as a police car, turning in, sprayed him with blinding light.

Oliver jumped back. He stood in the middle of the kitchen waiting for the doorbell. It didn't ring, although he heard the car stop and then heard footsteps—but the footsteps weren't approaching the front door. They entered the garage.

Oliver tiptoed to the door to the garage and listened. There was silence for a moment, then the footsteps started out.

Everything was fine. They'd just taken a casual look at the garage and come right out again. The doorbell rang. He went into the living room to answer it.

A big man with a flat face and meaty shoulders nodded to him. He wore unpressed civilian clothes. "Mr. Morgan? I'm Lieutenant Wylie, Homicide." He indicated a uniformed deputy sheriff beside him. "This is Deputy Wynn."

"Come in, gentlemen," Oliver said.

They came in and Wylie shut the door. He spoke to Oliver. "Put your clothes on, please, and come along with us."

"Why?" They probably wanted him to identify the body.

"You're under arrest for the murder of your wife."

"Janice is . . . dead?" Oliver looked and sounded properly horrified. He went into the bedroom to change his clothes. Both men followed, watching him with hard, unsympathetic eyes.

Oliver, putting on his jacket, shook his head as though to clear it. "Why are you arresting me?" he asked. "I loved Janice. She phoned that she was going to a movie in the valley. I haven't left the house since early this afternoon!"

The Lieutenant said briskly, "Does it rain *inside* that little sports car? The interior is sopping wet. And the poker beside your fireplace might interest the laboratory boys. *They can find bloodstains on* things you'd swear were absolutely clean. Maybe when I look around the house I'll come across a wet suit of clothes. Finished dressing? Well —"

"Now, look—" Oliver broke in desperately. "Until half an hour ago the Raleigh Minim was parked out in the rain. Then I remembered, drove it into the garage, and put the top on. As for the murder, my wife was kind-hearted to the point of foolishness. She could have picked up a hitchhiker or a dozen hitchhikers. She was driving the station wagon and there was plenty of room."

Lieutenant Wylie shook his head. "She wasn't driving anything. Her body was carried to the beach in a midget sports car. That's the only way we can account for the fact that in *rigor mortis* she was folded up like an accordion. If she'd been stuffed into the trunk of a big car,

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there'd have been signs of it—grease marks and the like. Any more theories you'd like broken?" he asked. "If not, let's go."

They left by the kitchen door, and Oliver paused in the garage to stare reflectively at the Raleigh Minim. Its chromium still glittered and its sweeping lines made it appear to be eager for the highway, trembling for release. Laughter gushed suddenly from his throat.

"I'll need money to retain a criminal lawyer, Lieutenant. Want to buy a sports car cheap? A bargain. Unconditionally guaranteed to land you in the gas chamber within a year—"

"Let's have no foolishness, Mr. Morgan. Come along."

"More carburetors than you can count, seventy miles to a gallon, and she cruises at forty miles an hour—"

"Mr. Morgan!"

"The top's a hood, the hood is a bonnet," Oliver sang loudly. *"It's painted gray with blue ribbons on it, and we'll hitch Old Dobbin to the shay—"*

"Give me a hand, Wynn! Don't stand there with your mouth open. Grab hold of his other arm!"

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A "lovely" story . . . about what happened at the PTA meeting of the Grover Cleveland Public School when the candidates for the School Board gave their electioneering speeches and then joined in the refreshments—and what happened was the first time it ever happened in Riverview's history . . . a "lovely" background, faithfully observed—and especially lifelike and convincing are the various members of the PTA. Chances are you've met one or more of them yourself!

THE PTA MYSTERY

by LIBBY MacCALL

THE RED PROWL CAR PULLED up to the curb in front of the split-level house. The third from the corner, with gray shutters. The burly young cop disentangled his bulk from the steering wheel and headed for the front door. He rang the bell, opened the door, and walked in.

"Norma?" he shouted.

"In the kitchen."

The imposing blue uniform loomed in the kitchen doorway, almost filling it completely. A young woman, presumably Norma, smiled a welcome. She went on ironing a child's blouse. A telephone receiver was tucked between her cheek and shoulder. She gestured toward the coffee pot at the back of the stove without interrupting the flow of her conversation into the mouthpiece.

"It was marvelous! Every time Warner opened his mouth he put his foot in it. He made a whole flock of new enemies last night. If he keeps on talking at meetings, and enough people hear him, he'll defeat himself. But let's not count on that. We have to go right on working for our good candidates. This town would be unbearable, with a bunch of book burners on the Board of Education.

"Besides, Mrs. Lo Presti sounds almost plausible while she's talking. But Warner's the real menace. Of course, somebody might shoot him. That would be the best permanent solution for an all-around stinker like that guy. Look, Sue, I've gotta hang up. My kid brother just walked in. 'Bye."

Norma interrupted her ironing long enough to remove the phone from her shoulder and replace it on the hook.

"Howya doing, Fred? Want a doughnut?"

Fred, who was now seated at the table sipping coffee, shook his head.

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"Thanks. Brenda says I'm getting too fat. So you had a good PTA meeting, did you? Big turnout?"

"It was mobbed. We haven't had this much interest in a School Board election in years. Thank goodness! Those two nuts had better get their wings clipped."

"One nut," said Fred.

"What?" exclaimed Norma. "You mean, one of them's chickened out? Which one? Come on. Give."

"That super-patriot, Mr. Eugene Warner, has been gathered to his fathers. As of this morning."

"You have to be kidding!"

Fred shook his head. "Nope. Headquarters got a call from his wife. They sent an ambulance, but he died before the hospital could do anything."

"What was it, Fred? Heart attack?"

"Don't know yet. They're doing an autopsy right now."

"Boy-oh-boy. Wait till I tell . . ."

"Hold on, now. You tell nobody. It'll be in the afternoon paper. I'm not supposed to be spreading the news. Just stick to your ironing."

Fred rose. The small kitchen seemed suddenly filled with policeman.

"Okay," Norma nodded. "I wouldn't want to get you in trouble. But be sure you stop in tomorrow and tell me all about the autopsy. Say hello to Brenda."

"Yup. Thanks for the coffee. S'long."

As he went out, the phone rang. Norma reached out a long arm, seized the instrument, and nestled it into place against her neck. She guided the iron expertly over the sleeve of a small boy's shirt as she shouted, "Hello?" in her loud, cheerful voice.

"Mary! How's your cold? . . . We missed you at the meeting . . . Yeah, almost three hundred. People seem really riled up about this election . . . Uhuh. Anything that happened since 1900 is experimental. Let's throw out all the new methods and every book that's got a glimmer of an idea in it. Back to McGuffey's Reader and The Three R's. And run all the newcomers out of town. That's their platform. Disagree with them and that makes you a subversive.

"Yeah. Well, I can guess why Mrs. Lo Presti thinks that way. When your husband's the garbage man, even if he makes lots of money running the scavenger franchise, you got to push somebody else down to build yourself up . . . Warner? Uh, excuse me, something's boiling over."

She disconnected the call hastily. It was impossible to discuss Board of Education candidate Eugene Warner without revealing her inside information. She decided not to answer the phone again until the afternoon paper arrived. Everybody would be wanting to talk about the meeting. It was safer to pretend she was not home.

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Norma finished the shirt and selected another roll of damp fabric from the heap in the plastic laundry basket.

As it turned out, Norma Hamlin, President of the Grover Cleveland Public School Parent-Teacher Association, had a chance to talk about the meeting before the afternoon paper was delivered. Fred drove up just after lunch, as she was dispatching her small son and daughter.

"Remember, now," she reminded them, "Come straight home from school. Come on in, Fred."

Norma set his cup of coffee on the table, poured another for herself, placed it next to her at the sink, and started on the lunch dishes.

"So, what's new?" she demanded.

"Plenty. Somebody had no faith in democracy, I guess. Didn't trust the people to see through Mr. Eugene Warner and defeat him at the polls. The guy was murdered."

Norma gasped. She turned off the water, carried her coffee to the table, and collapsed into a chair. Her long legs in their trim slacks sprawled. She ran slim fingers through her neatly combed Italian cut, giving the hair an untidy look. Her dark eyes sparkled with excitement.

"It couldn't happen to a nicer guy."

"Yeah, maybe. But people weren't buying his hate talk. They'd never have voted him in. Now the Riverview Police Department has to find out who killed him. And in a heck of a hurry if we don't want a whole crew of county and state wheels revolving like mad around here. That's why I'm back. Tell me everything you can remember about that PTA meeting. But every single thing."

"Glad to. First, tell me how he was murdered."

"Oh. Sure. Poisoned—arsenic. Must have been something he ate at your meeting, his wife says. What did you have for refreshments?"

"Liptauer."

"Come again?" said Fred.

"I thought you'd like that. We served an Austrian dish called Liptauer. You see, my neighbor, Hedy Green, was chairman of the Refreshment Committee for last night's meeting. You must know Hedy?"

"Cute little woman, kind of shy, with big eyes? Sort of soft and chubby? Her mother lives with her? Yeah, I know her. She put in a call for the prowl car a couple months ago. Her mother had a sort of hysterical fit. I helped her quiet the old lady down and get a tranquilizer into her, while Hedy's husband was hunting up a doctor."

"I remember—Hedy told me. She said you were awfully nice. Poor old Mrs. Panzenhagen's had a rough time. You can see the concentration camp number tattooed on her arm. That's why she usually wears long sleeves, even in the summer. The Liptauer is one of her recipes, from the old country. We

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had our meeting of the Refreshment Committee at Hedy's house. Hedy served us Viennese coffee and this marvelous concoction. It's a mixture of cream cheese and anchovies, with capers and paprika and caraway seeds. Mrs. Panzenhagen had modeled it into the shape of a mushroom. You spread it on rye bread or crackers."

"Whose idea was it to serve that for the meeting?"

"Golly, I don't remember who suggested it first. One of the girls, and everybody thought it was a great idea. Of course, we made some changes. Capers are too expensive for a PTA budget. And we didn't bother shaping the spread into a mushroom. We just mixed it up and made sandwiches. It was a nice change. We made ordinary fillings, too—egg salad, tuna fish, stuff like that. But everybody liked the Liptauer best."

"Yeah, I bet. And anchovies have a good strong taste—strong enough to disguise poison. Norma, think. Whose idea was it? Mrs. Green's?"

"No, she's too timid to make a suggestion. I had a hard time even talking her into taking on this Committee job. I persuaded her because I thought it would be good for her. Hedy needs to get out and meet people and make friends. Now I wish I hadn't."

"Who else was on the Committee?"

"Diane Warner, Renata Cosello, and Myra Shapiro."

"How'd Hedy pick them?"

"They volunteered," said Norma unwillingly.

"Did they, now? Did they know what the program would be?"

"Of course. Our January program is the same every year. We always have what we call a 'Candidates Night,' so our members can meet all the people running for the Board of Education. Golly, Fred, I don't like this one bit. They're all friends of mine—nice girls with kids in school. Why does it have to be one of them?"

"Did anybody else have a chance to feed poison to Warner? Any outsiders come in the kitchen?"

"Not that I remember. But maybe he was given the poison after he left the meeting?"

"Somebody's checking that out. But I have to investigate what happened at the meeting. Tell me how it went."

"First we had Cub Scouts do the usual flag ceremony. Then came the Treasurer's report and the Secretary's minutes of the last meeting. Each candidate spoke for five minutes. After that we had questions."

"Were all seven candidates there?"

"Yes. Ours were in fine form. We have awfully good men running this year. Warner and Mrs. Lo Presti handed out their usual line of bilge—excuse me, but that's just what it is. You know—let's make our dear little town the lovely place

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it used to be, with low taxes, no foreigners, no frills in the schools—no frills like science, say. Who needs it? Oh, don't get me started!"

"Skip all that. I know how they talk and I know how you feel about it. Say, you didn't do it yourself, did you?"

"Don't laugh, Fred. It's no sillier than accusing those other women."

"Except that I've known you all my life. I know you always fight fair. You'd rather clobber them with a ballot box. Go on— get to the refreshments."

"There's not much to tell. The girls had the sandwiches and coffee and tea arranged on a big table. Everybody came up and helped themselves—buffet style. I don't see how . . . hey, wait a minute! The candidates *didn't* help themselves. They sat down and the girls served them. But I wasn't paying any attention to how they did it. You'll have to ask them."

"Nobody else helped them?"

"Hedy's mother was out in the kitchen, filling pitchers from the coffee urn. She's too shy to come into the meeting room. Usually some of our PTA officers pitch in, if there's a big crowd. There's so much milling around—really, Fred, practically anybody could have done it and nobody'd have noticed."

"Well, thanks, sis. I better go talk to these dames. See you."

Fred turned the car in the direction of Diane Warner's house. Before he reached it, the two-way radio, which had been blatting steadily, summoned him back to Headquarters. He promptly changed course.

"Yeah? Something new?" he asked the Chief of Police, who was presiding personally over the first murder in the history of Riverview.

"Darn right, something new. Mrs. Lo Presti called. She just heard about Warner. Man, is she excited. Says somebody tried to murder her, too. She was sick all night. Better get right over there and see her, before she busts a blood vessel."

Fred steered his revised course to the Lo Presti abode, a pink stucco mansion in Spanish style, woefully out of place among the surrounding trim brick houses.

Mrs. Lo Presti, a lady of imposing dimensions, in a pink nylon housecoat, answered the door. She looked pale and agitated. She invited Fred to be seated in her expensively and garishly furnished living room, and treated him to a lengthy tirade on the subject of her sufferings before she allowed him to ask any questions.

"What did you have for dinner last night? Did anyone else in the family get sick?"

"Of course they didn't. I'm telling you, they tried to poison me at that PTA meeting. I'm just lucky I liked what they served, or I'd be

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dead, like poor martyred Mr. Warner."

"What did you eat?"

"I had some sandwiches with a very unusual filling. It was delicious. But Mr. Warner, poor soul, took only one bite. He said it tasted awful. After that he just drank coffee. I ate so much that I threw it all up after I got home. Oh, I was horribly sick. How those awful people . . ."

"Please, Mrs. Lo Presti. Just answer my questions. Have you any idea who served you the sandwiches?"

"No, I wasn't noticing. Mr. Warner and I were discussing campaign strategy. Anyway, I'm not personally acquainted with people of that type."

"Nobody else was sitting with you—no one but you and Mr. Warner?"

"Not while we were eating. The other candidates were all at another table together. Mr. Warner and I sat by ourselves to talk for a few minutes. What fools we were, making it so easy for them."

"Who do you mean by 'them'?"

"Why, the murderers, of course."

"Have you any idea who they might be?"

"Not exactly, but I'm sure it was the women who served us. Who else could it be? Some of those awful foreigners, moving into our lovely little town and causing so much trouble. And now this . . ."

Hastily Fred made his escape. A very poor witness, this woman. Highly emotional. She'd make a terrible School Board member, he thought. Hard to work with. Well, that was neither here nor there. He'd get back to interviewing his suspects, but he didn't look forward to it. They weren't exactly friends of his, but he knew them all. In a town this size everybody knew everybody, more or less.

Diane Warner was sitting on the steps of her small house, watching over her trike-riding three-year-old. She greeted Fred pleasantly.

"I came to ask you what you can remember about last night," he said. "I guess you've heard by now that Mr. Warner was murdered. And Mrs. Lo Presti says she would have been too, except she ate so much she threw it all up."

"I'd be a hypocrite if I said I was sorry," said Mrs. Warner. A slim, delicate blonde, carefully made up, she spoke with a slight French accent. She looked very young and helpless.

"My ex-father-in-law was a monster. He was loaded with hostility. He hated so many things and so many people. Anything that was different. Most certainly he hated me. He broke up our marriage, setting my husband against me . . ."

She began to cry. The tears that rolled down her cheeks were faintly blue from her eye make-up.

"I'm sorry," said Fred, "but I do

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have to ask you some questions. Did you help serve him and Mrs. Lo Presti?"

"No, I stayed far away from him. There were plenty of others to do it. I served the other candidates."

"Who did take care of them?"

"I have no idea. But we all helped make the sandwiches. Any of us could be responsible." The red-cheeked boy, who had been riding solemnly back and forth at the far end of the garden, turned around and began pedaling vigorously toward his mother. "Here comes my son. Please go away. I don't wish to explain what you're doing here."

Fred went. His next stop, a few blocks away, was at the shabby old frame house inhabited by the Shapiros. The front yard was full of noisy pre-schoolers. They swarmed all over the police car, but stood back respectfully when he instructed them to do so.

"Want to help me out?" asked Fred, who was used to dealing with neighborhood kids. "Listen to the radio for me, and if they say Car Seventy-two come call me. I have to talk to your mom—need to get some advice from her."

He left the kids listening intently, their eyes round with new respect for their mother, from whom a real live cop was seeking advice.

With many apologies Mrs. Shapiro admitted Fred into a house so lived in as to be frankly untidy. The lady of the house was comfortably fat, with brightly golden hair that showed an inch of black at the roots. She wore a paint-smudged smock and had a paint brush stuck behind her ear.

Fred followed her into the dining room, where the table bore a hodgepodge of ceramic tiles and a rainbow of paint pots. Renata Cosello, in a fresh smock that did not entirely conceal her provocative figure, sat painting industriously. She bestowed a sultry glance on the sturdy guardian of local law, and showed her white teeth in a brief smile.

"Excuse the mess," said Mrs. Shapiro. "This is my workroom. We eat in the kitchen. It's not the best-paying business in the world. With the kids still so little, I have to work at home. I'm lucky Renata can help me out when I get a big order. My husband does his best, but you know what teachers make."

"If we elect the right people to the Board of Education," said Mrs. Cosello, "maybe the teachers will get the raise they're entitled to. Anyway, we don't have to worry about Mr. Low-Taxes Warner any more."

"That's what I came to talk about," said Fred. "I don't know how much you've heard, but I guess you know at least as much as I do. The grapevine in this town is pretty efficient."

"They're saying he was poisoned at our meeting," said Renata Cosello cooly, "so it follows that we

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must have done it. Murder by the Refreshment Committee. Ha!"

"They'll excommunicate us from the PTA, if you can prove it," said Mrs. Shapiro.

"Ladies, this is no joking matter. Mr. Warner really did die from something he ate at your meeting. There was no dinner left in his stomach, just that one bite of sandwich. So the poison must have been in the sandwiches. Now, nobody's saying you did it. But we're hoping you can help us find whoever did. For instance, who actually served Mr. Warner?"

"We did." Mrs. Cosello's thick lashes drooped over her velvety dark eyes in an exaggerated imitation of an Italian movie star in a close-up. "But we gave him the same food everybody else was eating. How do you suppose we managed it?"

"And why. Don't forget why." Myra Shapiro began to paint again. "I admit it was a temptation, but you really can't kill off all the candidates who don't agree with you. It's the hard way to get your husband a raise, don't you think?"

"What about me?" asked Mrs. Cosello. "My husband's not a teacher."

"Look, quit needling me. I'm just doing my job. Did anyone else come near that table while Mrs. Lo Presti and Mr. Warner were eating together?"

"We didn't have time to notice," said Mrs. Shapiro. "There were a lot of hungry people there last night. We gave them sandwiches, poured coffee, and left the two of them with their heads together, plotting away. That's all we know. Innocent till proved guilty is the law, I believe."

"That's right," said Fred, giving it up as a bad job. "If you just happen to remember anything, please get in touch with me."

He thanked the kids for watching his car so efficiently, then drove slowly across town. The attitude of those two was most peculiar, he felt. And Mrs. Warner had taken no pains to mask her dislike of her father-in-law. Either they were all so innocent that it didn't occur to them to worry, or they were all in it together and had agreed to brazen it out.

He pulled up in front of the Greens' Cape Cod clapboard, having reached no conclusion. He had left Hedy Green until last, since she lived directly behind Norma. He could stop to confer with his sister before returning to Headquarters to report.

All was not well at the Greens'. Hedy looked wan and red-eyed.

"Please," she said, "if you don't mind, come into the kitchen. It's my mother. She's terrified of being alone, even for a moment."

"Okay," said Fred.

"She's been upset ever since that meeting of the PTA Refreshment Committee," Hedy went on. "Mother was happy to make one of

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her special recipes, for company. And she seemed to enjoy having the girls here. But then they began talking about the candidates who would be speaking at the meeting. One of them said Mrs. Lo Presti and Mr. Warner were just like the Nazis, and that was enough to upset her. The doctor wants me to put her in a home for the aged. He says it's bad for my little girl."

"That's tough. I hate to bother you with more trouble. But I'm afraid I do have to ask you a few questions. I guess you know that Mr. Warner was murdered."

"Yes, I know. It's terrible."

"I'm wondering if you can remember: the day the women met here, which one of them suggested having that stuff with the anchovies in it for the candidates meeting?"

"The Liptauer? I'm not positive, but I think it was Mrs. Warner."

"Will you tell me exactly how you prepared it? Did you do it at the school? Who bought the food?"

"Mrs. Warner and I bought everything at the supermarket on the day of the meeting. Mother came with us and waited in the car while we shopped. We took the coffee and cream and stuff to the school kitchen. The others met us there. We filled the sugar bowls, arranged the buffet table with paper cups and plates—oh, all the things you have to do. Then the girls came over here and we mixed up the Liptauer and the other spreads, and made the sandwiches. We wrapped them in waxed paper and wet towels, and put them in my refrigerator. That night I took them over to school in a cardboard carton."

"Was somebody in the school kitchen the whole evening? Could anyone who wasn't on the Refreshment Committee have gone in there without being noticed?"

"Mother was there. She was afraid to come out. The rest of us listened to the speeches. But anyone could have gone in. I don't think she knew who was on the Committee and who wasn't. She says all American women look alike."

"Who served Mrs. Lo Presti and Mr. Warner?"

Hedy Green looked up at the big cop with an anguished expression. "Do I have to say?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Green, I'm afraid you do."

"I'd rather not. But if I must, it was Myra Shapiro and Renata Cosello."

"Don't worry about giving them away. They already told me. I was *just checking out their story.*"

Hedy gave a great sigh of relief. "Oh, thank you for saying that. They're all such nice, good people. They wouldn't do anything so terrible as . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

"Okay, Mrs. Green. I'll be going now. But I may have to come back later with more questions. I hope your mother is better soon."

As Fred let himself in at Norma's,

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her brash, noisy tones could be heard from the kitchen.

"Okay, you two. That's enough cookies. You didn't study *that* hard. Run out and play."

Then two children galloped past him, each clutching a handful of freshly baked hermits. Fred opened the cookie jar, helped himself, and sat down at the kitchen table. Norma stooped to put a casserole into the oven.

"Any luck?" she asked.

"Not much. I didn't get far." He gave her a brief summary of his activities. "How about telling me what you know about all these dames?" he concluded.

"Gee, Fred, I feel like a female Judas. You know me. I like a good gossip as much as the next one—maybe better. But talking about your friends, when it might lead to having a murder pinned on them . . ."

"You think murder is ever justified? You may have disapproved of his politics, but Warner had a wife and family, you know."

"Okay. You win. Diane Warner was married to the oldest son. She insists her father-in-law broke up her marriage, just because she comes from France—Paris, I guess it was. Her father's with some perfume company here in the United States. Don't you remember when they moved here? She was in High School then, I think."

"Yeah. She was in my wife's class. Brenda says the boys went crazy over her. The girls all thought she was a spoiled, selfish brat. Brenda always said if Diane and her husband were really getting along so great, it wouldn't have been easy to break them up. Brenda thinks sonny-boy blamed the bust-up on papa and used him as an excuse to get away. Well, that's opinion, not fact. Can't put it in my report. What about the others?"

"Myra Shapiro. Her husband's a teacher at the High School. Myra says Warner told him he'd make it too hot for him, once he was on the School Board. Mr. Shapiro happens to be a wonderful teacher. Sure, he's a very liberal thinker—at the other end of the scale from Warner. They couldn't be in the same room two minutes without clashing. But, Fred, he had tenure—Warner couldn't have had him fired. Myra just wouldn't . . ."

"Hot-tempered, isn't she? She's got that reputation."

"She blows up, lets off steam, and it's over."

"What about Renata Cosello?"

"Well, she's furious over all this talk about foreigners, and newcomers being bad for the town. She always says: the first Mr. Warner was a foreigner, too. Renata's been sore at Warner ever since she moved here. When they bought their house, Warner was the real estate agent. The Cosellos claim he cheated them."

"How?"

"Renata says they were so green

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that they believed everything he told them. Like, they could save money by not having a lawyer—he'd take care of everything. He gave them a paper, which they trustingly signed. Turned out he then collected a fee for representing them, even bigger than a lawyer's would have been. Not to mention that he did nothing to earn it. Oh, they were wild. But they'd signed, so they were stuck with it."

"You know," Fred remarked, "I can't see Mrs. Cosello knocking the guy off two years later. She didn't strike me as a grudge holder."

"I agree—but then, none of these gals is my idea of a cold-blooded killer."

"You haven't mentioned Mrs. Green," Fred prompted.

"What should I say? Hedy keeps house, takes care of her little girl and her mother, who's more trouble than the kid. That's why I talked Hedy into being on the Committee. I thought if she didn't get an outside interest she'd go nuts. So what happens? She gets mixed up in a murder. Oh, Fred, I feel terrible about it."

"How could you know? Nothing like this ever happened in town before. Well, back to the salt mines. They'll hand me my head when they hear what I have to show for a whole afternoon of running around. Maybe some of the other guys had better luck. So long."

The red prowl car, like a milkman's tired horse, wended its way back to Headquarters where Fred's report was greeted with something less than enthusiasm.

"Fred, as a detective you're a great cop," said the Chief. "Let's hear what Steve has to report."

"Spent the whole day over at the school," said Steve. "Those dames did a wonderful job of cleaning up that kitchen. Nothing left in it. At least, the garbage man cooperated with us. He doesn't pick up till tomorrow. There were three full ash-cans out in back. We went through every dirty paper plate and cup. Found the empty waxed papers the sandwiches had been wrapped in. I brought them back. There was a mess of half-eaten sandwiches, dirty napkins, tea bags, and coffee grounds. Period."

"Let's see the waxed papers."

Steve opened the crumpled pieces of damp waxed paper, brushing off coffee grounds. Each length contained a slip of blue paper on which was written in pencil, *Egg*, *Liptauer*, *Tuna*, or *Salmon*.

"What's that?" said Fred.

He pointed to a slip of paper which bore only some penciled numbers: 752743. The Chief picked up the paper.

"Funny. It's the only one that's different."

"Maybe that was to identify the poisoned sandwiches?" Fred suggested.

"Okay, boy, there's your assignment for tomorrow. Find out which one of your dames wrote this and

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what it's supposed to mean. She better have a good story."

Fred inspected the paper.

"That's queer," he said. "Look at the sevens. They have a line through the tails. I never saw anybody write a seven like that."

"I did," said Steve. "In High School my French teacher did. I think all Europeans do."

"Any of your refreshment dames go to school in Europe, Fred?" asked the Chief.

"Mrs. Warner did. I'll check on the others."

"Do that. First thing tomorrow."

The red police car was becoming a familiar sight in front of the Greens' house. Before Fred could ring, Norma appeared at the door.

"Come on in, but be quiet," she whispered. "I saw you through the window. Hedy's mother's sleeping. I'm just convincing Hedy she should get some rest, too." She turned to Hedy. "Your kid can have lunch at my house."

"Look what we found," said Fred. He held out the crumpled blue paper. "Know what it is?"

Hedy Green looked at it for a long moment. Then she burst into tears.

"That's mother's concentration camp number. Where did you find it?"

"In the garbage can at the school, mixed up with the sandwich wrappings."

Hedy gave a great gulp, wiped her eyes, and looked up resolutely.

"I'll have to tell you," she said. "I killed Mr. Warner—yes, it was me. I did it for the sake of my little girl. There will be no Fascists in her life. I won't let it happen again, not here in America. I used rat poison. I knew the strong taste of anchovies would cover up the taste of the poison. I wrapped up the extra sandwiches and marked them with this paper, so they wouldn't get mixed up with the others."

"Why did you write that particular number?" asked Fred.

"What would you have put? Poison? I used the number to give me courage in case I lost my nerve. I was the one who gave the poisoned sandwiches to Mr. Warner and Mrs. Lo Presti."

"Hedy, you're lying," said Norma. She turned to Fred. "She never left that buffet table. She was busy pouring coffee the whole time we were serving refreshments. I was standing right next to her, pouring tea."

"Where were you born, Mrs. Green?" Fred asked.

She stared at him blankly. "What has that got to do with it?"

"Never mind. Just answer me."

"I was born in the Bronx."

"And where did you go to school?"

"In the Bronx."

"Then how come you write your sevens the way Europeans do?"

Hedy Green began to cry again. Fred strode to the telephone and dialed Mrs. Shapiro's number.

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"Where did you get the sandwiches you served Warner?" he asked without ceremony. "Did you take them from the refreshment trays on the buffet table? I have a pretty good idea of the answer, so you may as well tell the truth . . . Yeah . . . Okay, thanks." He hung up.

"What did she say?" asked Norma.

"She says Mrs. Green's mother, Mrs. Panzenhagen, handed her a paper plate of sandwiches as she was leaving the kitchen. 'For the Fascist hounds,' the old lady said. Mrs. Shapiro thought she was kidding. When she heard about the murder she guessed what must have happened. But she didn't lie to me. She just didn't tell all she knew. Thought she'd protect the old lady. Like you, Mrs. Green. It's a good thing Norma was here."

"No! No! You can't arrest mother. She didn't know what she was doing."

"We know," said Norma. "So does your doctor. They'll just put her where she can get good care. Really, Hedy, you'll all be better off to have her in a good home. Now, don't worry."

"I'll trouble you for what's left of that rat poison, before I go back to make my report," said Fred. Hedy fetched it and Fred read the label. "Yep. Arsenic trioxide. That's what they found when they did the p.m. How did you know she used rat poison, Mrs. Green?"

"We always keep some in the house—on a high shelf, of course. Mother likes to see it there. She was so afraid of the rats—in the concentration camp. Yesterday I noticed that somebody had squeezed the tube. And I knew we didn't have any rats."

"I'm on my way, then. The Chief will have to eat his words about me not being a good detective. But if I never have to do it again, it will be soon enough for me."

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NEWEST Inspector Chafik story by
CHARLES B. CHILD

The compassionate little Chief Inspector of the Baghdad police, Chafik J. Chafik, faced the most baffling mystery in his long career. Strange things were happening in Kademein, the holy place, the sacred Shrine of the Shia-a, and to add immeasurably to the danger it was the eve of Muharram, the festival that was a time of mourning. One uncontrolled spark could bring out the mobs and mass violence . . . And Inspector Chafik, that compassionate and conscientious man, asked himself: "How can I weave with broken threads?"

One of Mr. Child's most delicately wrought detective stories . . .

THE DWELLING PLACE OF THE PROUD

by CHARLES B. CHILD

CHAFIK J. CHAFIK, A POLICEMAN of Baghdad with many duties, entered his office in a well-guarded building on upper Rashid Street early in the morning of a very hot day. He complained to the uniformed sergeant who attended him with the night's reports, "Is it ordained that I must sit in dust?" and took a feather whisk from the lower drawer of a filing cabinet. When he had brushed his chair he sat with proper care for the creases that his wife had pressed into the trousers of his white linen suit.

"Proceed," he said to the Sergeant.

"Sir, there are corpses—"

"A day without corpses in Baghdad will be a day when our streets are perfumed with roses."

The Sergeant, a very large man, whose bulk contracted the small office, recognized domestic symptoms. His mahogany-colored face was proofed against expression, but his tiger's eyes were sad. He made a prayer for himself and others, said, "May God will it!" in answer to the Chief Inspector's reference to roses, and went on, "About the corpse, sir—"

"So? Corpse singular? Why then bother me with corpses plural?"

"All clay robbed of souls demands our attention," the Sergeant said severely.

Inspector Chafik stood up. He was a small man with high, bony shoulders, delicate feet and hands. His head was large for his body, his face thin, his nose long, his lips full

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under the ghost of a mustache. Large dun-colored eyes, flat as the land of his birth, were animated by the shadows of his thoughts. In profile he had the likeness of a Babylonian king.

He salaamed humbly to his assistant. "Forgive me, my dear Abdullah—I brought personal troubles to the office. How rightly you correct me in pointing out that all corpses once had souls!"

"We are liable to forget," Sergeant Abdullah said in a forgiving voice.

"Please continue about the singular corpse." Inspector Chafik reached for cigarettes, changed his mind, restlessly tapped the desk with his fingertips. He had nicely manicured nails and there was a signet ring set with a red intaglio on the small finger of his left hand.

"The corpse is named Hamid Babur," Sergeant Abdullah began his recitation of the facts. "Age, about sixty. Address, Mohamed-bin-Ali Street, Kademein—"

Chafik interrupted, "Holy Kademein has been in various reports recently—an epidemic of stomach troubles probably due to over-indulgence in broken glass, scorpions, and the other delicacies they eat up here."

He was a religious man but he had an intellectual's scorn for the conjurers who infested the great shrines of his Faith. Kademein, a town four miles from Baghdad, was a glory of Islam and a policeman's nightmare; in its twisting alleyways were born the mobs that sometimes terrorized Baghdad. The Shrine was particularly sacred to the *Shia* denomination, which, for centuries, had opposed the caliphate of the orthodox *Sunni* majority. Thus the Christians, too, had shed each other's blood for dogma.

Inspector Chafik, a middle-of-the-road man, straddled the schism of his Church.

"How did Hamid Babur die?" he asked Sergeant Abdullah.

"Death, by poison, sir."

"A woman's weapon. How many wives? How many concubines?"

"Deceased had one wife and no known concubines. A cobbler by trade. No fortune except his sweat. Upright. Devout. He habitually rose at dawn to make his prayer at the Shrine—"

"Death was sudden?"

"Within the holy precincts, sir. Preliminary medical reports suggest a narcotic poison—"

"Probably a hashish addict. We all have our vices." Inspector Chafik took a cigarette from the box on his desk, tapped it on a thumbnail, frowned, and dropped it unlit into the king-size ashtray. "Recite the history of the other corpses," he said brusquely.

The patient Sergeant obeyed.

First, the Inspector pondered a knifing in the Alwiyah district where the body of a bedouin girl had been found ripped in the belly. She had been a brothel inmate. "Look for

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her father or a brother—she disgraced her family and the tribal law is strict," he said.

He was considering the case of a male corpse taken from the river, a strangler's cord around the neck, when he was interrupted by a call from the Police Chief of Kademein. "A moment, my dear *mufawwadh*." Chafik made a bow to the telephone and said to Sergeant Abdullah, "Find out if the knot was a fisherman's knot. If so, hold for interrogation Hassan Azak who moors his boat near the old Beit Malek Ali. That one moonlights odd jobs for the gangs . . . I am now at your disposal," he said into the telephone.

"My concern is the death of Hamid Babur—"

"It has been brought to my attention—"

"I would be gratified, Chief Inspector, if you would give it priority. You know we have an epidemic of sickness up here?"

"Is that unusual in a drainless jungle?"

"The one who died—a poor shoemaker—was much loved for his saintly works. And the sick are all religious men. And we are at the eve of *Muharram*—"

Somber shadows moved across the screens of Inspector Chafik's drab eyes. The festival was the opening month of the Moslem year, a time of mourning for the *Shia-a*, a time when those rigid dissenters flagellated themselves to achieve a condition of religious ecstasy. Rumor, howling like a wolfpack through the labyrinth of Kademein, could bring out the mobs.

The little man reached for a cigarette and then with an impatient gesture swept the box from the desk.

"How bad is the situation?" he asked the Chief of Police.

"We require reinforcements—"

"I come."

Sergeant Abdullah drove the car. They followed the left bank of the Tigris, passing the Abdul Kadir palace and the burial ground of Iraq's short-lived monarchy. They crossed the river at the site of the old Bridge of Boats and went through groves of date palms and cemeteries; the bodies of the devout, brought from Persia and beyond, once by camel train, now by General Motors trucks, were a richer investment to landowners than the tree.

The streets of Kademein, unchanged from the days of Turkish domination, were attic-hot where the sun struck and cellar-cold where the sun could not reach. Houses with shuttered windows leaned on one another as they seemed to reel in drunken oblivion. An odorous place, and silent, but Chafik was not fooled.

"A policeman's knock would shake out the bedbugs of ancient hates," he said to Abdullah.

"Holy men live here, sir."

"Accept my apologies."

They came to the *midan*, the

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great square in front of the Shrine, and a view of the forty-foot pillars of the Rose Gate, covered with glazed tiles of pink and turquoise-blue arabesque; there were seven gates to Kademein, all but the Rose Gate were closed on the eve of the time of mourning.

A chain hung between the pillars at the level of a tall man; it was caught up in the center and gracefully looped.

The sanctuary was encompassed by gray walls. There were many beggars—the halt, the blind, and the conjurers. Chafik noticed a crouched figure in a doorway opposite the Shrine; a pale face, a boy and a cripple, he thought, and Chafik paused to thank God for blessing him with a healthy son.

He cricked his neck as he strained to look up at the golden towers and cupolas of Kademein. The Gate, earth-level for mortals, was easier to see. He watched the worshippers pull down the chain to bless it as they entered.

"A symbol—just a symbol!" he grumbled. "Chains—prisons—martyrs!"

Sergeant Abdullah, who was of the *Shia* persuasion, ground his gears as he stopped at police headquarters.

The *mufawwadh* was an old friend, a tall thin man whose professional ulcers gave him a melancholy expression. When they had ritually greeted one another, Chafik said, "I am flattered by your request for my help, but you are as competent as me to investigate this mystery."

"The Assistant Director does not think so."

Chafik shrugged. "That little rooster has to crow twice to make himself heard."

"He will crow more than twice if the death of Hamid Babur is not cleared up on a non-religious basis," the Kademein Chief of Police said grimly.

He beckoned Chafik to the window. Below was the courtyard of the Shrine, beautifully paved, the ablution tanks crystal, the doors and archways graciously proportioned and patterned. The two major domes of Kademein were golden shields turned to the blazing sky; communities of doves clustered and occasionally rose in clouds when disturbed by the chanting of the worshippers. There were four slender towers, each girdled with anachronistic strings of electric lights, which sent their nightly beams over the desert land. Once fires had blazed on these gilded minarets to guide pilgrim travelers.

Kademein was a tree tap-rooted in yesterday. Inspector Chafik kissed his hand in respect.

He took his friend's binoculars and examined the scene. "Who is the one in the doorway?" he asked, remembering the boy he had noticed from the police car.

Not a boy, he saw now; not even a wizened child. The head was too large, the body somehow truncated,

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the legs were lost under the hem of a ragged gown such as street urchins wore—the whole squatting on a crude platform mounted on wheels. Enormous eyes were fixed on the towers and domes of Kademein.

"Yusif, son of Ahmed Fadil," the Chief of Police said. "Not so young as you might think—one detained in childhood—"

"Speechless?"

"Yes."

"But his eyes talk. How they plead! Why is he not taken into the Shrine? Sometimes in moments of ecstasy the sick become whole—no miracle!—even psychiatrists do not claim magic for their gods."

"His father forbids it. Ahmed Fadil hates God."

Inspector Chafik played with a cigarette. "No, no!" he said when his friend reached for matches. "My wife," he explained with a nervous laugh. "She is a visiting lady at the hospital and concerns herself with those who cough themselves to death. Why does Ahmed Fadil hate God?"

"Clearly, because he was given an incomplete son. He is a proud man—"

"Pride is like perfume—pleasant to inhale but revolting to swallow. The blasphemy is in his bile, not in his heart."

"May that be true," the Chief of Police said piously. He went on, "The man has had many troubles. In his youth he wished to be a doctor but failed to pass the examinations. He is employed as an attendant in the mental ward of the State Hospital. Last month his wife died. He is pockets-down with debts and furthermore has trouble with the *Qadhi*—"

Chafik raised his eyebrows. The *Qadhi* sat in judgment in the religious courts, which, among other matters coming under Koranic law, dealt with family problems. "What is Ahmed Fadil's offense?" he asked.

"He neglects his son."

The little Inspector sighed. "And foolishly he thinks he can punish God?" He adjusted the binoculars to watch the worshippers as they entered the Shrine. Each man reached for the chain looped across the doorway, pulled it down with a rattle of links, pressed it to forehead and lips. A father bearing a boy of circumcisional age on his shoulders paused to permit the small one to grasp the tattered handgrips and sturdily raise himself for the ritual. A cloud of tumbler doves obscured the view and Chafik turned from the window.

"You referred to the sickness as an epidemic. Describe the symptoms."

The Chief of Police took medication for his ulcers. "Well," he said, as he put down the glass. "First, the victim becomes immobilized. In some cases the heart is affected. He collapses. Later there may be vomiting. Normally, the condition clears within twenty-four hours. According to the medical authorities there are traces of a poisonous

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substance in the vomit. Its nature has not yet been determined."

"But more important, what causes such an epidemic? A germ? A virus?"

"It has not been determined."

A disturbance at the Shrine drew Chafik's attention. A fanatic who shrieked, "Ali!—Hussein!—" clung to the chain and covered it with kisses. He was removed by the attendants whose duty it was to keep order within the sacred walls.

Tension thrummed like a drawn bowstring as others cried, "Ali! Hussein! Ali-Hussein! Hussein-Ali!" naming their martyrs with a frenzied mourning chant. Soon the flagellants and head slashers would begin grissly demonstration, and madness would reign in Kademein.

Time to mourn. Time to hate. Time to transfuse the ancient schism with the fresh blood of self-inflicted wounds.

"They begin early this year," said the Chief of Police.

"Because of the sickness?"

"Yes. There were the usual smoldering rumors and Hamid Babur's death added fuel. He was a devout man, and as I have said, the people think this evil comes from the *Sunni*—that the sickness strikes only the very devout *Shia*, those who say *Fajr* at Kademein—"

"You mean that only those who attend the early morning prayer are inflicted with the sickness?"

"Mainly so. There have been a few mild cases during the afternoon prayer, but the majority occur at the dawn hour. Hamid Babur was always of that congregation and he had previously had the sickness. This time he died—at the foot of the sepulchre of Musa-bin-Tafar. Excuse me—" The Chief of Police answered the telephone.

The little color in his face faded; the look he gave Inspector Chafik was expressive.

"It has happened. A *Sunni* knifed a *Shia* in a cafe brawl. The mobs are out. If more are taken sick at *Fajr* tomorrow we will need troops."

Chafik left his friend and joined Sergeant Abdullah who had waited with the car. The big man was watching the crowds. "Trouble brews," the Sergeant announced.

"You croak like a bird of ill-omen."

"Trouble brews," repeated Abdullah. He pointed with his chin at the gathering mob. "There are doorways which we should sandbag for machine-gun posts—"

"There is a doorway with a fine view of the Gate and at present it is occupied by a cripple—"

"Previously noted and under surveillance, sir."

"Oh, most perfect of policemen! Your light runs before you!" Inspector Chafik at once apologized for his testiness. "If only I could smoke I would not be so fretful," he confessed, and gave the crumpled cigarette to a whining beggar.

It was before the hour of *Zuhr*;

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the open place fronting the Shrine would soon fill for the afternoon prayer. Chafik went to the doorway where the son of Ahmed Fadil crouched, small and frail and lonely. The hands, used to propel the wheeled platform, were callused; the legs under his gown were withered.

Unblinking pain-racked eyes were fixed on Kademein. Yusif paid no attention when the Inspector spoke to him.

"Don't waste your time. He neither hears nor speaks," said a bitter voice at Chafik's elbow.

The man was tall and thin. A Pharaoh's mummy out of its wrappings, Chafik thought, and the description was apt; the man had the hawk nose and long skull of a yesterday's Egyptian, the same delicate hands and feet, the same high cheekbones and sensuous lips. And the same pride. He looked down at the Inspector as a god at a mortal.

Chafik noted the cleanliness of the white linen trousers and short-sleeved tunic and recognized the uniform of a hospital worker. "You are Ahmed Fadil?"

"Does it concern you?"

"I am concerned when a father neglects his son."

"You call *that* a son?" The man pointed to the cripple in the doorway. He shrugged with contempt as he uncovered a small basket, took out a bowl of scraps, a round of unleavened bread, a crock of soured milk, and put them within reach of the silent youth. Thus food was given to a kenneled dog. "I do my duty," the man said in his bitter voice. He picked up the basket.

"God asks more than duty—He asks you to give your son love."

It stopped Ahmed Fadil as he turned to go. His chin jerked up and he declared in a voice harsh with anger, "There is no God!"

He spat in the direction of the golden domes of Kademein.

Sergeant Abdullah, who loomed behind the Inspector, took a step forward, his hand hovering near the worn leather of his holstered gun. A glance from Chafik stopped him.

"If there is no God, why do you hate That which does not exist?" Chafik asked softly.

"I hate all those who mouth prayers to a myth, who degrade their bodies by flagellation."

"But some men, Mr. Fadil, scourge themselves mentally. Do you? Because of him?" Chafik pointed at the mute in the doorway.

The man looked at his son for the first time. There was a moment when his face softened; then he turned his back and said savagely, "That is what your God gave me! Surely there will be a reckoning!"

"There is a time of reckoning for all of us."

Ahmed Fadil's eyes blazed. "The time has come for *them*!" he said, pointing to the great gate of the Shrine where the devout were gathered for prayer. "They corrupt even this husk of a thing you call

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my son! Look at him—how he longs to be with them! I forbid it! Look at him—look—"

Yusif's small body was rigid, but his lips moved soundlessly, shaping the words in unison with the chanting of the worshippers.

The father spat in disgust and went away with long strides.

"Let him go," Chafik told Sergeant Abdullah. "Pride and hatred blind him. Poor fool—one day his eyes will open—"

Inspector Chafik sat in his small office which overlooked the busy thoroughfare of Rashid Street. He had been sitting there since his return from Kademein, and the pile of crushed and unsmoked cigarettes in his ashtray was evidence of wrestling with a priority problem. Subordinates who brought routine problems were treated to a blank look and extraneous snatches of conversation.

He said in a sleepwalker's voice to an officer reporting a confession from the father of the bedouin girl found with slit belly: "But how was it administered to so many?" And to another who came to confirm that Hassan the Fisherman had indeed knotted the cord about the neck of the man found in the river: "How can I weave with broken threads?"

When Sergeant Abdullah arrived with the autopsy report on Hamid Babur, the Inspector was quoting the 29th verse of the 16th chapter of the Koran, ". . . evil is the dwelling place of the proud." The understanding Sergeant crisply interrupted, "Permit me, sir, to advise you that you talk to yourself," and tapped the report for attention.

Chafik shuddered like a man coming out of a nightmare. "Ah, that habit—can I never break it?" He was in the act of lighting a cigarette when he remembered the promise to his wife, and said glumly, "Now I have two habits to plague me." He studied the report.

Hamid Babur had an organic heart condition and it had killed him. But there were also traces of the powerful drug found in the vomit of the more fortunate victims of the Kademein sickness. Analysis mentioned "curare," and the Inspector called the police laboratory.

"Oh, Father of Intestines!" he said to the pathologist in charge. "Enlighten me about this drug you found within the corpse I sent you. It was my understanding that curare is used by South American natives to poison their arrows—"

"In a crude form, yes, Inspector. It causes immobilization of the animal struck by the arrow. Then the creature's throat can be cut at leisure—"

"But I understood—"

"—that the scratch would kill, Father of Ignorance?" The medical man laughed merrily. "You have been reading detective stories. Hamid Babur would not have died if

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it had not been for his heart condition."

"Does the drug work if taken orally?" asked Chafik.

"It might cause vomiting, but not seriously. If, however, there was a cut on the mouth—an abrasion—"

"And the condition of the mouth of Hamid Babur?"

Papers rustled. Then the pathologist said, "There was a jagged cut on the lower lip—"

Inspector Chafik reached for a cigarette, then angrily discarded it. "Tell me," he rasped. "Tell me, Father of Hearts and Livers, did those who did *not* die of the Kademein sickness also have abrasions near their mouths?"

"I must look. I have the reports of the Health Officer."

The small policeman cradled the telephone under his chin; his hands wove spider's webs as he waited. When the doctor came back he greeted him harshly, "Well?"

"Examinations made by the Health Officer of the more serious cases do include mouth sores—"

"So!" The Inspector chose and toyed with another cigarette and then asked in a deceptively gentle voice, "My dear Doctor, about this curare thing and my ignorance—what is it in substance?"

"Well, it is defined as coming from a loganiaceous vine or tree—a resinous extract, dark brown in color—an aromatic, tarry odor—um—not unpleasant—"

"Used medically?"

"Beneficially so. We use it in conjunction with shock treatment to bring patients out of deep depression. Curare keeps them from hurting themselves. These mental cases require—"

Chafik slammed down the telephone and rose tiptoe, balanced on the balls of his feet to give himself stature. His thin sharp face was a mask cast in bronze newly drawn from the furnace. Shadows swirled in the flat drab eyes; so kite-hawks gather in the desert sky above a kill.

"Tomorrow we say *Fajr* at the Shrine of Kademein," he said to Sergeant Abdullah.

And added, "Petition God for a miracle . . ."

The stars were still the bright eyes of the night when Inspector Chafik rose from beside his sleeping wife. He appreciated her as he dressed; they had been twenty years married, and her dark hair spread over the pillow brought to his mind words of an old love song, "Your ringlets are daggers in my heart." He went to look at his son.

Faisal had ten years. Perhaps more. He was an elfin-eared boy born without name in the labyrinth of the Baghdad bazaars where the Homeless Ones ran. Chafik had chosen Faisal, and Leila, his wife, had given him rebirth.

They were very happy with their adopted son.

The Inspector removed the plas-

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tic machine gun that the boy cuddled, replaced it with the schoolbooks that had fallen from the bed, kissed Faisal lightly, and went away.

Sergeant Abdullah was waiting outside. They drove from the Street of the Scatterer of Blessings, where Chafik lived, to Kademein. They passed through a city that slept uneasily; it was already tomorrow and *Muharram*, but too early for religious fervor to mount the mobs.

The police car crossed the Tigris into the area of date palms and tombs. Pre-dawn silence cloaked the land and Inspector Chafik shivered as he toyed with the new inevitable unlit cigarette. "The cold is in my soul," he said to the solicitous Sergeant.

"Prayer will warm you, sir."

"I overflow with prayer—also I ooze fear—my body has the odor of a freshly killed chicken."

The diadems on the towers of Kademein had scattered the stars when Chafik halted the car. They went on foot through the winding sewers of the streets into the freshness of the *midan*. At this hour the Shrine was black-walled and the Rose Gate a splash of ebony.

Aloft, where the dawn now challenged the night, a lark prematurely greeted the day.

"The Crier, fortunately, still sleeps," said Inspector Chafik as he looked up at the muezzin's tower.

Unsleeping was the son of Ahmed Fadil. Yusif was couched in the doorway, hunched in his rags, the pale oval of his face turned to the sky. Sergeant Abdullah raised him with a scoop of bear's paws and lowered him to the Inspector's shoulders, crotch hooked about Chafik's neck, the withered legs tucked under his armpits.

He was as light to carry as a confessed sin.

The Inspector walked with Yusif across the open place to the Gate of the Shrine.

A yawning Crier adjusted the microphone on the east tower of Kademein as the lark's song soared to meet the rising sun. The call to prayer, a sobbing chant, went out over the sleeping city, its faith a song to God.

"*Allah-u Akbar!*"

Four times repeated.

A many padding of feet as those roused by the Call ran to the Gate. There they were halted by lines of police who rose from lurking places.

"*Ash-hadu al-la-ildha ill-Allah!*"

As the Voice pronounced the creed, Chafik approached the doorway. There was now light in the land and he could see the dangling chain. His frail burden raised himself and reached for the loop.

"*Hayya 'alas-salah!*"

The appeal to come to prayer was sung with all the emotion of faith. Then, suddenly, the mute on Chafik's shoulders echoed it. Sound burst from a throat too long silent. Harsh, yet singing. And ended in the wail of a disappointed child as Chafik stopped short of the Gate.

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Extended hands. Pleading eyes.

"God the Merciful! God the Loving-Kind!" prayed Inspector Chafik, shaken with wonder.

He had directed the police to permit one man to pass the barrier, and now he came, tall, thin, crying without pride: "No!—no!—do not let him touch it!"

Ahmed Fadil dropped to his knees between the Gate of Kademein and the man who carried his son.

"Is there then a barrier between Yusif and his God?" asked Chafik.

"The chain—"

"Chains are made to break or to bless if they have been worn by marytrs." The Inspector spoke with calculated impatience and moved forward, wishing he could move back.

The man rose and barred the way. He looked, not at Chafik, but eye-level with the Inspector's burden.

Yusif did not see his father, but reached for the chain, as a child reaches for the unknown world beyond the cradle.

Ahmed Fadil struck down his son's hands, shouting, "It is poisoned!"

He tore off his neckcloth and wiped the links. "See?" he cried. The cloth was soiled with a brownish substance sweet with the odor of honey.

There was blood on his hand.

"So you also roughened the links to cut the mouths of the devout before you applied the curare?" said Inspector Chafik.

"Yes—"

"You stole the extract from the mental ward, came at night, put the curare on the chain?"

"Yes, yes."

"You planned an epidemic for Kademein to incite the mobs, to put man against man, sect against sect?"

"But I did not intend a man should die—that Hamid Babur—"

"You did all this because you have been given an incomplete son? Because you hated God?"

"Yes—yes."

"*You confess?*" Inspector Chafik asked the question as a policeman concerned only with secular law. In this moment he towered, dominated the Gate of Kademein. Then he said in a humble voice, "May I be forgiven. Your crime is against God, and in His Court you will find justice."

He signaled Sergeant Abdullah to remove Ahmed Fadil. And sensitive to the voices of the worshippers, he heard the calm as they streamed to the Gate, answering the call to prayer.

"*La ildha ill-Allah!*"

"Do you hear?" Chafik asked the burden that he now bore lightly on his shoulders.

The Inspector kicked off his shoes and walked into the promise of the Shrine.

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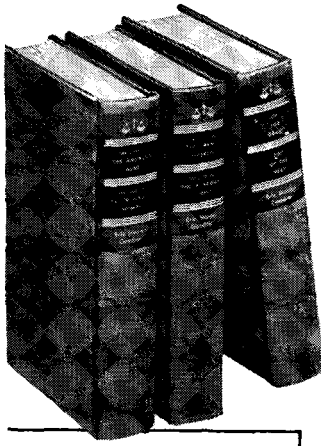

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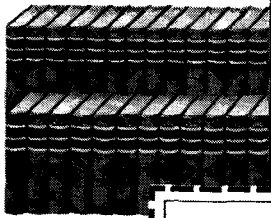

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